GUN AT A KNIFE FIGHT: REGIONAL INTERVENTION IN CIVIL WARS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA, 1957-2018

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation analyzes the conditions under which regional states intervene in civil wars in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The puzzle motivating this research is why states engage in costly interventions that have a poor track record of success, and often lead to sub-optimal outcomes by generating conflict escalation, regional instability, and humanitarian crises. The dissertation has two key findings, with implications for the scholarly literatures on intervention, regional competition, and alliance dynamics, as well as policy implications. First, states are more likely to intervene when their leadership believes they have experienced a recent loss in terms of their regional status, and when they believe that the outcome of the conflict will reflect on their regional status. This hypothesis suggests that rather than misperceiving the chance of success or experiencing over-confidence, leaders are more risk-acceptant in a bid to recover from a recent perceived loss in regional status. Second, because states in the region depend on great powers to acquire and sustain their military capabilities, if a great power chooses to exert the leverage that it possesses over a regional partner to push back against intervention, the regional state is more likely to intervene at a lower level on the intervention scale. However, if a great power patron does not use its leverage, or provides military logistical assistance to the intervention, regional states are more likely to intervene at a higher level

on the ladder. I test these hypotheses using process-tracing in eight qualitative case studies of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, the UAE, and Qatar's intervention or non-intervention in the civil war in North Yemen from 1962 to 1970, and the ongoing civil war in Yemen that began in 2014.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Theory

Introduction

In 1962, following a military coup that that displaced the thousand-year-old Yemeni Imamate in North Yemen, the United Arab Republic (Egypt) deployed up to 70,000 troops to support the revolutionary government. Until the end of the intervention in 1967, the UAR, with the assistance of Soviet aircraft and pilots, repeatedly launched airstrikes on the Saudi cities of Jizan and Najran, near the Yemeni border. The intervention coincided with the height of what Malcolm Kerr dubbed the "Arab Cold War," a period of intense regional rivalry between conservative monarchies led by Saudi Arabia and UAR President Gamal Abdel Nasser's transnational revolutionary movement.

Saudi and U.S. officials worried that the UAR's military presence in Yemen could provide a platform for Nasser's efforts to foment instability within Saudi Arabia, and for the Soviet Union to expand its influence in the region. However, in spite of this acute security threat in a place they regarded as their virtual backyard, Saudi leadership provided weapons and funding to the insurgency against the new government but did not intervene directly in the conflict.

In contrast, on March 26, 2015, Saudi Arabia and a coalition of Arab states launched *Operation Decisive Storm* to intervene directly in Yemen's civil war on behalf of the internationally recognized government of Yemen and nominally allied Yemeni forces. The intervention includes a sustained campaign of air strikes, the blockade of air and sea routes into Yemen, and the deployment of ground forces, coordinated by the UAE but with contributions from other coalition members as well. The conflict has since generated more than 60,000 conflict-related fatalities, at least 3.6 million internally displaced persons, a devastating famine,

and the worst cholera epidemic in history, affecting at least 1 million people.[1] What explains this variation in Saudi Arabia's response to civil wars on its southern border?

This dissertation explores the conditions under which states like Saudi Arabia and the UAR are likely to intervene in civil wars in the MENA region. Specifically, my research investigates regional and international systemic explanations for regional state military intervention in civil wars. In contrast with much of the existing literature, I develop theoretical explanations for intervention that locate the causes largely outside of the dynamics of the civil war itself, at the regional and international levels, while also investigating a set of additional explanations that are derived from the existing literature.

The dissertation has two key findings, with implications for the scholarly literatures on intervention, regional competition, and alliance dynamics, as well as policy implications. First, since the 1956 Suez Crisis, states in the MENA region have competed to increase their regional status, a relational and social signifier of "collective beliefs about where a given actor 'stands' relative to others."[2] A key component of regional status is contestation over regional influence—that is, regional powers compete to win over other states as allies or to install sympathetic governments in the region. Civil wars, where parties within a state compete for control over the government, are a key mechanism that regional powers use increase their relative status. Competition for status has been a critical part of how states in MENA view their regime's domestic stability: a loss in regional status is seen by senior decision-makers as detrimental, since such a loss shifts the regional balance of power in an unfavorable way and may therefore

[1] According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), more than 60,000 conflict-related fatalities were recorded between January 2016 and December 2018, but the true figure is probably much higher. ACLED, "Press Release: Yemen War Death Toll Now Exceeds 60,000 According to Latest ACLED DATA," December 11, 2018, https://www.acleddata.com/2018/12/11/press-release-yemen-war-death-toll-now-exceeds-60000-according-to-latest-acled-data/.

[2] Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017): 21

make a regional states' own government more vulnerable to a coup or domestic instability. For instance, the wave of revolutions that toppled several autocratic governments during the Arab Spring has been viewed by many of the region's conservative monarchies as a threat to their regional status.

My research finds that when a state experiences higher levels of what I term "status anxiety" due to the perception that it has recently lost regional status, and when its leadership believes that it has a significant stake in the outcome of a civil war, intervention at a higher level is more likely. While intervention may appear to be the result of misplaced over-confidence, I argue that the cognitive "negativity bias" leads to a willingness to take greater risks via intervention following a perceived loss of status.[3] Leaders fear a loss of regional status because it can affect the domestic stability of their regime: a decline in status can trigger the defection of domestic supporters of a leader, serve as a rallying cry for the opposition, or inspire domestic opponents. This theory is a new perspective on intervention in civil wars that differs substantively from more traditional balance of power arguments. While balance of power arguments privilege material measures, I argue that in addition to military capabilities and other such material factors, regional leaders are deeply concerned with perceptions of their own status, and in particular a recent loss of status.

Second, a states' relationship with great powers also affects the likely degree of intervention. States must possess the requisite military capabilities to deploy beyond their borders in order to intervene in a civil war. Some MENA states have invested in developing conventional military capabilities by working closely with the United States or other great power patrons. Others, such as Iran, have chosen to mitigate liabilities in their conventional military

[3] Dominic D. P. Johnson and Dominic Tierney, "Bad World: The Negativity Bias in International Politics," *International Security*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Winter 2018/19), 96-140.

capabilities by investing in asymmetric capabilities. Moreover, militaries in the region are substantially weakened by politicization, including coup-proofing efforts by weakly institutionalized governments that lack popular legitimacy, as well as by a lack of combat experience.

Regional states' ability and willingness to intervene is therefore substantially affected by their relationships with great power patrons, for two reasons. First, the military capabilities of most countries in the region are directly related to the arms sales, training, financial aid, and other forms of military-military assistance that great powers provide. The United States has long-standing military assistance programs with regional partners like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Jordan that are critical to building and maintaining the capacity of these militaries. Second, most countries in the region do not have the capability to project conventional military power beyond their own borders, and require the logistical military support of a great power in order to do so. I find that as a consequence, when great power partners offer military logistical and other forms of support for an intervention, regional states are more likely to intervene at a higher level. However, if a great power patron chooses to exert leverage over a regional state, the regional state will be more likely to intervene at a lower level or not at all.

Although there is a great deal of scholarly research on the effects of military intervention in civil wars, there has been comparatively little on the conditions that make intervention more or less likely. This is problematic because existing studies assume that intervention is intended to end a conflict, ensure one side wins, or provide humanitarian assistance, but these assumptions are rarely borne out empirically. Such assumptions may therefore be inadvertently introducing systematic bias into our knowledge of the effects of intervention: a better understanding of the causes of intervention will therefore enhance the scholarly study of intervention more broadly.

Military intervention also tends to transform relatively localized conflicts into regional conflicts that spread across the borders of the civil war state and often last longer, generating higher numbers of casualties from violence and other grave humanitarian effects. Effectively, when they intervene, regional states are taking a gun to a knife fight. Recent civil wars in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and elsewhere have drawn intervention from a variety of states in (and outside of) the region and have continued at high intensity levels. These conflicts have generated humanitarian crises and have contributed to a wave of refugees, with significant impacts on the domestic politics of the countries they arrive in as well as trans-national security implications. These conflicts have also spilled across state borders, threatening the stability of neighboring states and providing potent breeding grounds for organizations like ISIS and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, with major security implications not only for their hosts but for the world.

These findings therefore have implications for practitioners who are concerned with conflict resolution and managing the United States' relationships with its allies. The findings will help policymakers anticipate regional intervention by understanding the warning signs that intervention is more likely. My findings also suggest specific tools that policymakers can use to exert leverage over regional states to limit regional states' intervention in civil wars when such warning signs are present.

Puzzle and Contribution

Under what conditions are states are more or less likely to intervene in an ongoing civil war in the MENA region? What factors affect the degree to which a state is likely to intervene, i.e., whether states intervene indirectly, through the provision of weapons, financial resources,

training, and other forms of support, or directly, by conducting air strikes or even deploying their own troops on the ground?

The decision to intervene in civil wars is puzzling because intervention does not appear to be the result of a rational-cost benefit analysis on the part of interveners. Military intervention is often understood, both in the literature and in popular accounts, to have one of three (often overlapping) goals: to end the conflict, to ensure that one side wins, and/or to protect civilians. Yet studies of the effects of military intervention indicate that intervention is rarely 'successful' in terms of altering the on-the-ground dynamics of the conflict to meet the preferences of the interveners. If this is the case, then why do third party states intervene in the first place?

First, some studies have explained intervention as an attempt to end the conflict, whether for security or humanitarian reasons (or both). Notably, Regan's study of the causes and outcomes of intervention assumes that "there is one overarching goal of trying to bring an end to the fighting between groups in the civil war conflict by manipulating the relative capabilities of combatants to wage war."[4] By this logic, leaders who decide to engage in military intervention must have an *ex ante* expectation that success, defined as ending the conflict, is at least reasonably probable. Yet according to Regan's own data, when success is understood as ending the conflict,[5] the "overall success rate" of intervention between 1944 and 1994 is only about 30 percent.[6] Although Regan's data ends in 1994, evidence from subsequent years—including military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, the DRC, Somalia, and elsewhere—suggests that this trend of low success rates has continued.

[4] Patrick M. Regan, *Civil Wars and Foreign Powers: Outside Intervention in Intrastate Conflict* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 10. To give Regan's argument its full due, he notes that "not all interventions have the explicit goal of stopping the hostilities, but other conceptions of success considered by potential interveners can often be achieved by stopping the fighting, or at some level require this as a necessary first step," Regan, *Civil Wars and Foreign Powers,* 42.

[5] Specifically, success is "operationalized as the cessation of military hostilities for a period lasting at least 6 months;" Regan, *Civil Wars and Foreign Powers,* 14.

[6] Regan, *Civil Wars and Foreign Powers,* 2000, 29.

In contrast with this assumption, however, a number of studies have found empirical evidence that far from ending the violence, military intervention actually tends to increase the duration of civil wars.[7] Regan and Aydin highlight the tension between this assumption and empirical outcomes, noting that "Much of the empirical literature suggests that outside interventions tend to lengthen the expected duration of civil wars; conversely, the policy community often acts as it if holds the opposite expectation."[8] The conventional wisdom—that states intervene in civil wars because of concerns about regional stability or humanitarian crises—therefore makes little sense given that such interventions tend to prolong, rather than end, the conflict.

Second, military intervention on behalf of one party to the conflict in many cases does not make victory by that side more likely. Gent finds that while rebel-biased interventions increase the likelihood that the rebel group will win a civil war, interventions in support of the government side have no statistically significant effect on the outcome.[9] Third, military intervention does not necessarily have positive humanitarian outcomes. Wood, Kathman, and Gent find that biased military intervention makes the party that it supports less likely to engage in anti-civilian violence, but makes the supported party's adversary more likely to target civilians.[10] This suggests that biased military intervention does not have a significant humanitarian effect, casting doubt on explanations for intervention that point to humanitarian

[7] Dylan Balch-Lindsay and Andrew Enterline, "Killing Time: The World Politics of Civil War Duration, 1820-1992," *International Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2000); Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Måns Söderbom, "On the Duration of Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (2004); David E. Cunningham, "Veto Players and Civil War Duration," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (2006); Patrick M. Regan and Aysegul Aydin, "Diplomacy and Other Forms of Intervention in Civil Wars," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 5 (2006).
[8] Regan and Aydin, "Diplomacy and Other Forms of Intervention in Civil Wars," 736.
[9] Stephen E. Gent, "Going In When it Counts: Military Intervention and the Outcome of Civil Conflicts," *International Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2008).
[10] Reed M. Wood, Jacob D. Kathman, and Stephen E. Gent, "Armed Intervention and Civilian Victimization in Intrastate Conflicts," *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 5 (2012).

concerns.[11] How can we reconcile this low success rate with the assumption that states intervene in civil wars in order to end the conflict?

Finally, in contrast with the assumption that success means stopping the fighting, some studies have argued that states may intervene when a rival has already intervened—success here might be defined as bleeding the resources of a rival by inducing them to get bogged down in an intractable conflict.[12] However, these studies focus on understanding the results of intervention rather than the causes per se, and this assumption remains untested empirically. Nevertheless, they do suggest that research on the regional and international causes of intervention would be fruitful.

War is costly[13]—even limited intervention entails reputation costs, opportunity costs, the expenditure of state resources, and in the case of direct intervention, casualties. If intervention is rarely successful in stopping violence or helping a particular side to achieve victory, why do states continue to invest in military intervention? Even the 'greed' explanation for war—that states intervene in order to secure access to resources (e.g., a common explanation for Rwanda and Uganda's involvement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo)—does not necessarily hold up to logical scrutiny: if it is cheaper to access such resources through trade than through war (i.e., there is an *ex ante* bargain available), why would states choose to use the relatively costly option of military intervention in order to access such resources?

In summary, intervention in civil wars is a high-risk proposition with a low-likelihood of success. It is also costly and often followed by unintended negative consequences that are difficult to predict, from the risk of getting bogged down to the rise of new insurgent groups like

[11] E.g., Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs About the Use of Force* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2004).
[12] Seden Akcinaroglu and Elizabeth Radziszewski, "Expectations, Rivalries, and Civil War Duration," *International Interactions* 31, no. 4 (2005); Balch-Lindsay and Enterline, "Killing Time."
[13] James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995).

ISIS in the aftermath of intervention. This research seeks to reconcile these dissonant theoretical and empirical trends by analyzing whether and how international systemic forces, in addition to preferences about the outcome of the conflict itself, lead states to intervene in civil wars.

Despite its prevalence since 1945, as well as its clear relevance to policymakers, military intervention in civil wars has been understudied in the academic literature. Although the study of civil war causes, dynamics, and outcomes has flourished in recent years, relatively few scholars have studied the question of *why* states intervene in civil wars. Below, I briefly summarize the literatures related to military intervention. One strand of literature analyzes the effect of third party intervention on outcomes, but does not directly consider the causes of intervention per se. A few scholarly works do consider the causes of intervention, but I argue that these do not consider external/systemic variables in a comprehensive way. Finally, I review two studies that do not consider the causes of intervention directly, but nevertheless suggest that an inquiry into the international systemic causes of intervention would be a fruitful endeavor.

Several studies have considered the effects of third party military intervention on civil war *outcomes* (i.e., intervention is the independent variable). However, while they sometimes address the *causes* of intervention at the margin, the vast majority of these studies conceptualize third party intervention as an exogenous or independent variable. Barbara Walter argues that third party intervention makes negotiated settlement more likely.[14] Negotiations fail because both sides face a time inconsistency preference problem: they cannot credibly commit to carry out the future terms of a negotiated settlement. This problem can be mitigated only by the presence of a third party who can ensure that both sides will demobilize.[15] Regan finds that contra "ex ante expectations that interventions should reduce the duration of conflict," third party interventions

[14] Barbara F. Walter, "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement," *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (1997).
[15] Walter, "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement, 340.

actually tend to increase the duration of civil wars.[16] Regan that conflicts with "opposing interventions" tend to be longer than conflicts that do not have opposing interventions.[17]

Several studies have found that military intervention is likely to increase the duration of civil wars.[18] Balch-Lindsay and Enterline, for instance, find that balanced intervention—conflicts in which both major parties are supported by a third party relatively equally—prolongs civil war.[19] Cunningham argues that whether civil wars are prolonged by intervention depends on the intentions of the intervener.[20] When the third party and its proxy have similar preferences, intervention does not have a significant effect on duration, but when the third party and its proxy's preferences diverge, intervention is associated with longer conflicts. Finally, Edelstein analyzes the conditions under which post-conflict occupations are likely to be successful.[21] However, while analyzing the outcomes of intervention and occupation, these studies do not address the causally prior question of the *cause* of intervention itself.

Additionally, this research seeks to identify the *conditions under which* intervention is more or less likely, rather than *why* states choose to intervene, per se. The question of why states support violent non-state actors, especially actors categorized as terrorist groups, has been explored, notably by Byman in his book *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism*.[22] State sponsorship of terrorist groups, or a government's intentional assistance to a group that bolsters its capacity to use violence or its political activities or sustains the organization in some

[16] Patrick M. Regan, "Third-Party Interventions and the Duration of Intrastate Conflicts," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (2002), 59.
[17] Regan, "Third-Party Interventions and the Duration of Intrastate Conflicts," 71.
[18] Collier et al, "On the Duration of Civil War;" Regan, *Civil Wars and Foreign Powers*; Regan and Aydin, "Diplomacy and Other Forms of Intervention in Civil Wars."
[19] Balch-Lindsay and Enterline, "Killing Time."
[20] Cunningham, "Veto Players and Civil War Duration."
[21] David M. Edelstein, "Occupational Hazards: Why Military Occupations Succeed or Fail," *International Security* 29, no. 1 (2004).
[22] Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

other way, "is cheaper than developing conventional military capabilities, and it can allow states to influence events far beyond their borders."[23] Byman identifies several reasons that states sponsor terrorist groups: to destabilize or weaken a neighbor; to project power (i.e., as a supplement to conventional military capabilities); to change the regime; to shape the opposition; to enhance their own international prestige; to export a political system; or to support groups that domestic constituents see as 'kin,' whether religious, ethnic, linguistic, or otherwise. Strategic motivations are the most common explanation, particularly destabilizing a neighbor or projecting power in the region. Of course, these motives can also overlap in practice: for example, Iran's attempts to export its Islamic Revolution since 1979 are ideological, but also strategic in that Iran aims to project power, and related to domestic politics in the sense that the interventions seen by the public as supporting fellow Shi'ias.

States intervene in civil wars for similar reasons: to provide strategic support to a friendly regime or oppose and weaken an enemy; to harass an antagonist or destabilize a neighbor; to stabilize a shared border or because of regional stability concerns; to export an ideology; or to support ethnic or sectarian kin. In this research, I assume that one or a combination of these reasons *motivates* states to intervene.

However, these motivations do not explain variation in intervention decisions across space and time. Strategic concerns, ideology, and domestic political concerns remain relatively constant across time. Since 1979, for example, Iran has sought to export its ideological revolution, support Shi'ia groups in the region, and destabilize or project influence in its neighbor Iraq; however, these motivations do not explain variation in Iran's intervention decisions across this time period. My research therefore asks: *under what conditions* do these motivations become more or less salient?

[23] Byman, *Deadly Connections*, 5.

Dependent Variable: Intervention

The decline in inter-state war has been a defining feature of 20th and 21st century international relations. As many IR scholars have noted, the number of ongoing inter-state wars per year has declined dramatically since 1945, leading some to hypothesize an 'end of war.'[24] Trends in the incidence of civil war are less linear: although the number of ongoing civil wars generating more than 1,000 battle deaths per year rose between 1945 and the end of the Cold War,[25] the incidence large-scale civil war has declined by more than 50 percent since 1991.[26] However, although the overall number of battle deaths per year has declined steadily over the past few decades, scholars have noted that this trend has dramatically reversed over the past few years. According to Goldstein, the total number of battle deaths per year rose from 25,000 in 2011 to more than 100,000 in 2014, a trend driven largely by the ongoing civil wars in Syria and Iraq, as well as in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Ukraine.[27]

Taken together, the data suggests that while inter-state war has declined to the point that it is almost obsolete, intra-state conflict, has tenaciously hung on as a fundamental feature of global politics. Figure 1, with from UCDP's Armed Conflict Dataset, demonstrates these trends: although the numbers of each type of conflict vary on an annual basis, the number of ongoing inter-state wars has systematically declined across the 20th and 21st centuries, while the number of ongoing intra-state conflicts on an annual basis has increased since 1945.[28] Another notable trend is that the number of internationalized conflicts—that is, intra-state conflicts with

[24] Joshua S. Goldstein, *Winning the War on War: The Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide* (London: Penguin, 2011); John Mueller, *The Remnants of War* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2004); Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011).
[25] James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003).
[26] Lotta Themnér and Peter Wallensteen, "Armed Conflicts, 1946-2013," *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 4 (2014).
[27] Joshua S. Goldstein, "World Backsliding on Peace," *The Huffington Post,* August 3, 2015 (accessed January 28, 2016).
[28] Petterson and Wallensteen,"Armed Conflicts, 1946-2014."

intervention from outside states—has increased steadily since 1945. While this does not measure the total number of interventions in each conflict, it does suggest that intervention in civil conflicts is a tool increasingly used by third party states.

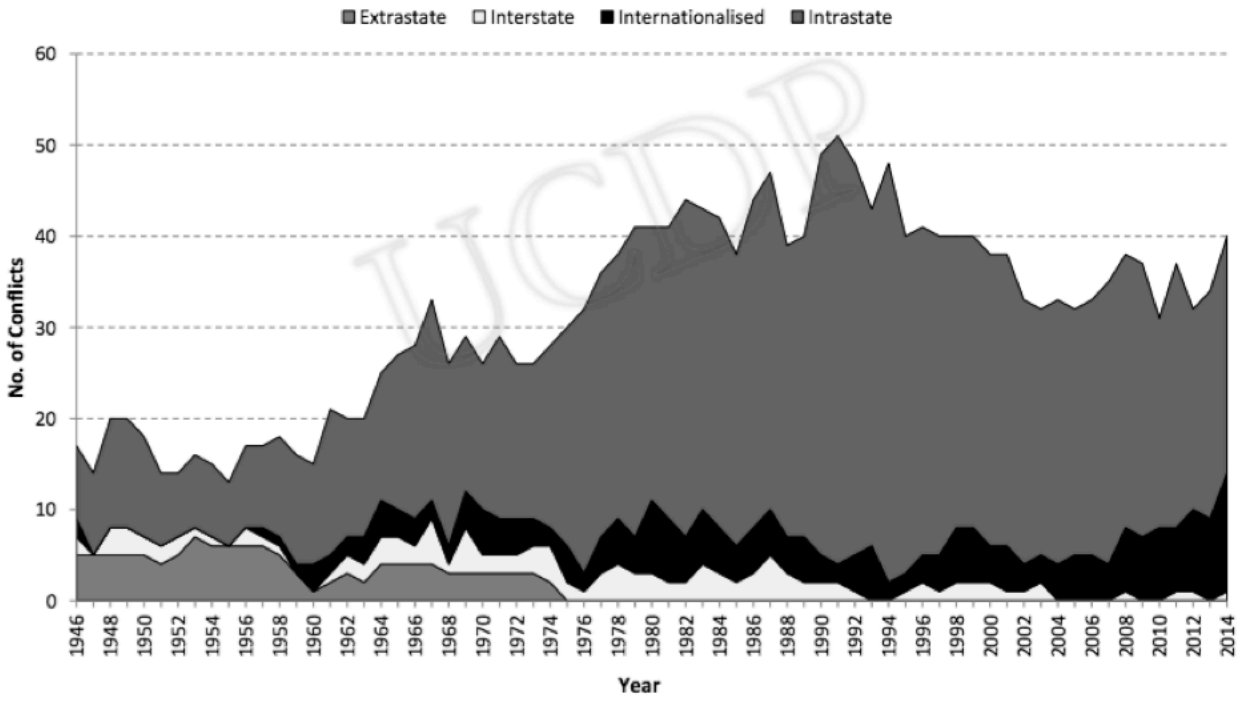

Figure 1: Armed Conflict by Type, 1946-2014

Source: Pettersson, Therese; Stina Högbladh & Magnus Öberg. 2019. "Organized Violence, 1989-2018 and Peace Agreements." *Journal of Peace Research*. 56(4): 589-603.

I have developed a ladder of intervention along a scale ranging from no intervention to conventional ground forces intervention. While other scholars have developed more complex ladders of intervention,[29] I have consolidated intervention into 3 levels for ease of analysis.

1) No intervention

2) Indirect: financial assistance, weapons, training, intelligence, etc.

[29] For another intervention scale, see Andrew Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition? The Rise, Fall, and Reprise of Soviet-Russian Military Interventionism, 1973-1996* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), Chapter 1.

3) Direct: conventional forces, air strikes

While sometimes difficult to measure, level one—no intervention—is easily defined. Level two, indirect intervention, is a basket of actions that facilitate military support but do not place the intervening state's military personnel in direct combat roles. This includes the provision of financial assistance, weapons, training and advisory assistance, military intelligence, and other forms of logistical support, such as aerial refueling of aircraft involved in combat operations or transportation of military personnel into the combat theater, whether that assistance is overt or covert.

The third level, or direct intervention, refers to an intervening state placing its own conventional forces on the ground or in theater in order to engage in kinetic activity. In addition to deploying conventional ground troops, this category also includes air strikes, as well as other forms of direct combat such as placing Special Forces operations on the ground, drone strikes, surface-to-surface missile strikes launched from sea.

Many cases of intervention involve more than one level of intervention concurrently: for example, a state may conduct airstrikes on behalf of a government (level 3) while also providing that government with advisory and training assistance (2). In such cases, intervention is coded as occurring at the highest level observed in a given time period.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Loss of Regional Status ("Status Anxiety")

First, I hypothesize that the dynamics of regional competition affect whether or not states are likely to intervene in an ongoing civil war. More specifically, I argue that leaders are more

likely to intervene in a civil war when a) they believe they have suffered a recent loss in terms of their regional status, and b) they have a stake in the outcome of the civil war—that is, the outcome of the conflict would have an additional effect on their regional status. I argue that MENA leaders are deeply concerned about their regional status because they believe their status has a direct effect on their regime's domestic stability. In the face of a negative event, i.e. a recent loss of status, leaders become more acceptant of the risks entailed in intervention. States in the MENA region compete to increase their relative power vis-à-vis other regional states.

MENA states often face a particularly acute version of the security dilemma: under anarchy, each state's actions to increase its own security leads others to feel less secure.[30] This dynamic leads states to engage in balancing behavior in order to increase their relative security.[31] While other regions of the world have seen one regional hegemon or predominant power emerge at different time periods, this has not occurred in the modern MENA region. States in the region, including Nasser's Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and at various times Syria and Iraq, have aspired to the role of regional hegemon, but no state has even approached the level of relative power that would elevate it to regional hegemon status.[32] Instead, over the course of the 20th and early 21st century, the region has seen a series of "strategic triangles" and similar multi-polar arrangements in which several states compete for regional hegemony.[33]

[30] Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (1978); Charles L. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics* 50, no. 1 (1997); Ken Boot, and Nicholas J. Wheeler, "The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics," (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
[31] Alan R. Taylor, *The Arab Balance of Power*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982); Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
[32] Louise Fawcett, *International Relations of the Middle East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 199.
[33] Henner Fürtig, "Conflict and Cooperation in the Persian Gulf: The Interregional Order and US Policy," *The Middle East Journal* 61, no. 4 (2007): 627.

I argue that MENA states do not primarily balance in the material way that realist theorists might expect, through the acquisition of conventional modes of power. Of course, acquiring conventional military capabilities is one means of competition. However, the primary mode of competition, I argue, is over regional status.

It is widely agreed that "leaders, policy elites, and national populations are often concerned, even obsessed, with their status and reputation," even if political scientists disagree about why.[34] Status refers to "standing, or rank, in a status community," constituted by a "hierarchy composed of the group of actors that a state perceives itself as being in competition with. 'Rank' is one's ordinal position and is determined by the collective beliefs of members of that community."[35]

Regional status is socially produced, but has instrumental value. Competition for regional influence has been a critical part of how states in MENA view their own regime's stability: a loss in regional status is often seen by senior decision-makers as detrimental to regime survival, may make a regional states' own government more vulnerable to a coup or domestic instability. For instance, the wave of revolutions that toppled several autocratic governments during the Arab Spring and subsequent fallout was viewed by many of the region's conservative monarchies as a threat to both their regional status and to their domestic stability. As Nonneman notes, "The central pursuit of most MENA regimes remains that of domestic survival—and the search for legitimacy, acquiescence, and control to assure this."[36] Gause argues that MENA states balance not just against perceived threats, but "against the power that presents the clearest challenge to

[34] Allan Dafoe, Jonathan Renshon, and Paul Huth, "Reputation and Status as Motives for War," Annual Review of Political Science 2014, vol. 17, pp. 371-393: 381; also see S. Tang, "Reputation, Cult of Reputation, and International Conflict," *Security Studies*, 14 (1): pp. 34-62, B. O'Neill, *Honor, Symbols, and War,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999, D. Kagan, *On the Origins of War and Preservation of Peace,* New York: Doubleday, 1995.
[35] Renshon, "*Fighting for Status."*
[36] Gerd Nonneman, "The Three Environments of Middle East Foreign Policy Making and Relations with Europe," *The Review of International Affairs* 3, no. 2 (2003).

their domestic regime security." For the Saudi state, for instance, "the most serious threats to Saudi security are those where a major regional military power also directly attacks the domestic legitimacy of the Saudi regime and tries to encourage elements of the Saudi population to oppose the regime."[37] Walt argues that states in the Middle East tend to balance against perceived threats, where threat perception is linked to the material distribution of power, but also factors including perceived intentions, geographic proximity, and offensive capabilities. Some states in the region respond to threat by bandwagoning rather than balancing, but this behavior is typically only displayed by weak and isolated states.[38] Gause shows that MENA states perceive threats to their internal stability as directly linked to international security threats.[39] As Ulrichson puts it, there is a "porous relationship between internal and external security" for MENA states.[40]

Intervention in civil wars, where parties within a state compete for control over the government, is a key mechanism that regional powers use to extend their regional influence. Providing additional support to a friendly government or supporting the opposition to an adversarial government can lead to an additional friendly regime in the region, but can also boost the intervening state's reputation for supporting its 'side.' Intervention can therefore assist in the intervening state's appeals to the MENA public. Conversely, losing a civil war could give an opponent more influence and therefore a larger, stronger-seeming platform for their message to the regional public. This in turn could provide the opponent with additional fuel for expanding its own regional influence.

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[37] F. Gregory Gause III, "Saudi Arabia's Regional Security Strategy," *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf,* ed. Mehran Kamrava, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 176.
[38] Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).
[39] Gregory F. Gause III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[40] Kristian Coates Ulrichson, "Links Between Domestic and Regional Security," in ed. Kristian Coates Ulrichson, *The Changing Security Dynamics of the Persian Gulf*, (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), 23.

State weakness in the MENA region is ubiquitous, particularly in the hinterlands that fall outside of the direct control of capitals. This weakness allows violent non-state actors to flourish, which in turn offers the opportunity for other states to opportunistically interfere in adversarial states by providing material support to non-state actors that oppose the state, whether or not the interests of these groups align directly with those of their state supporters. At the same time, these conditions provide outside states the opportunity to shore up their relationship with a friendly state through the provision of support. As a result, "the regional struggle for power and influence in the Middle East is played out as much, if not more, in battles over the direction of domestic politics in weak states like Yemen, Lebanon, Palestine, and since 2003, Iraq, as it is in the clash of regional armies in open war."[41]

States in MENA do compete for regional status by acquiring the traditional tools of state power, including military capabilities and economic resources. Additionally, however, a key component of such competition occurs via appeals to the domestic publics of their own and other states. Regional status is often directly linked to domestic regime security in the region, at least in the minds of leaders themselves, due to the fact that states are weakly institutionalized and lack domestic legitimacy.[42] MENA regimes therefore use ideology and sectarianism or other types of narratives as means to appeal directly to Arab publics domestically and abroad to mobilize support. These appeals have been structured around different sets of ideas across time, whether Nasser's appeal to pan-Arab revolutionary socialism in the 1950's and 60's, or the more recent instrumental use of sectarian identities, to mobilize potential supporters across the region,.

[41] Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, 9.
[42] Benjamin Miller, "Balance of Power or the State-to-Nation Balance: Explaining Middle East War-Propensity," *Security Studies* 15, no. 4 (2006); according to Ted Gurr, states are legitimate "to the extent that their citizens regard them as proper and deserving of support" (Gurr 1970, 185.)

Transnational identities are "the most important and distinctive factor in the [MENA] regional security complex" because they are "seen as threats by leaders to their own regimes."[43] The ability to appeal to the Arab public in a credible way, and to thereby be able to shape the convictions of the Arab street, is a critical source of status. As Marc Lynch notes, "put simply, real strength flows from being associated with popular ideas," leading to "intense competition to capture the mantle of the Arab public and to shape the trends in Arab opinion of the last decade."[44] The ability to appeal to the domestic publics of rivals, and therefore affect a rival's internal security, and to conversely prevent the external penetration of a state's own public arena, is therefore a key source of power.[45]

States therefore assess potential threats not just in terms of potential rival's conventional military capabilities, "but also in terms of ideological differences in the expressed hostility of regional rivals."[46] As Calculli and Legrenzi argue, the securitization of sectarian identities—that is, the elaboration of a security discourse by state and non-state actors—is a tool through which key regional players have either attempted to capitalize on domestic instability, resulting from popular upheavals, or to elaborate new defensive strategies and coalitions in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings."[47] During periods of regional upheaval, such as the Arab Cold War or the more recent Arab Spring, "ideational threats [become] particularly destabilizing, for the diffusion of ideas and ideologies [is] liable to dramatically erode the domestic bottom-up legitimacy of already fragile power authorities."[48] Competition for regional influence is therefore a key means

[43] Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, 9.
[44] Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2012), 19-20.
[45] Lynch, *The Arab Uprising*, 22.
[46] Gause, "Saudi Arabia's Regional Security Strategy," 177.
[47] Marina Calculli with Matteo Legrenzi, Chapter 10, "Middle East Security: Conflict and Securitization of Identities," in *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 219.
[48] Calculli and Legrenzi, "Middle East Security," 223.

of attaining both international and domestic security for MENA states, where international and domestic security are inextricably linked.[49]

Renshon argues that "because states can expect to profit from higher status and because status is positional (and thus states can be expected to be reluctant to cede status voluntarily), violence may be one way of *achieving* higher status."[50] In other words, states decide to fight wars in part to improve their ranking within the status community. I argue that states are more likely to engage in a particular type of conflict—namely, intervention in civil wars—in a bid to improve their regional status, but under specific conditions. Leaders are more likely to intervene when they have experienced what they perceive as a recent loss in terms of their regional status. A number of IR theories have argued that loss is more salient than gain for individuals, and that therefore individuals become more risk acceptant when they perceive themselves to be in the domain of losses; in the domain of gains, in contrast, they are likely to be more risk-averse. Psychologists have discovered that across a wide range of human cognition, "negative phenomena have stronger effects on judgement and decision-making than do positive phenomena."[51] Indeed, a landmark survey of the experimental psychology literature found that this negativity bias is "one of the most basic and far-reaching" principles of human psychology.[52] Applications of prospect theory to international relations have applied the concept of "loss

[49] Also see Bruce W. Jentleson and Dalia Dassa Kaye, "Security Status: Explaining Regional Security Cooperation and its Limits in the Middle East," *Security Studies* 8, no. 1 (1998).
[50] Jentleson and Dassa Kaye, "Security Status," 24.
[51] Negative phenomena are defined as "information, events, or beliefs with the potential to cause undesirable or bad outcomes (e.g., encountering threats, losing resources, suffering military defeats…" Johnson and Tierney, "Bad World, 96.
[52] Roy Baumeister et al, "Bad is Stronger Than Good," *Review of General Psychology*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (December 2001), pp. 323-370; also see Paul Rozin and Edward B. Royzman, "Negativity Bias, Negativity Dominance, and Contagion, " *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (November 2001), pp. 296-320.

aversion" to argue that "people are more sensitive to losses than gains and are willing to gamble to avoid a forfeit:" even a modest loss considerably raises most individuals' risk acceptance.[53]

The logic of negativity bias and loss aversion suggests that when the leaders of a state believe that it has experienced a recent loss in terms of regional status, and when in addition to that they have a stake in the outcome of a civil war conflict (in other words, when they have a preference for which side wins), intervention is more likely. Although intervention may therefore appear to be the result of over-confidence, this argument suggests that leaders are more willing to take on the risk that intervention entails in a bid to recover from a recent loss in regional status. Additionally, I argue that over the course of an intervention, status concerns will be heightened by the prospect of a costly withdrawal in the face of defeat. Hence, once an intervention has begun, this Hypothesis predicts that the intervention will continue unless one side of the civil war conflict wins or the intervener's military capabilities are so eroded that they are unable to continue the intervention. While interveners may alter their tactics or strategy, they are unlikely to alter the intensity of an intervention, or to withdraw altogether, in the absence of an exogenous end to the conflict or an erosion of the intervener's military capabilities.

Hypothesis 2: Great Power Relationships and Intervention Capacity

Much like regional states, great powers, including the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia, have played out their global rivalries in the MENA region by attempting to increase their regional influence, due to the importance of the region to great power's national

[53] Johnson and Tierney, "Bad World," 98; for more on loss aversion in IR, see Robert Jervis, "Political Implications of Loss Aversion," in Barbara Farnham, ed., *Avoiding Losses, Taking Risks, Prospect Theory and International Conflict* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Jack S. Levy, "Loss Aversion, Framing Effects, and International Conflict," *Synthese*, Vol. 135, No. 2 (May 2003), 215-221.; Rose McDermott, "Prospect Theory in Political Science: Gains and Losses from the First Decade," *Political Psychology*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (April 2004), 298-312; Jonathan Mercer, "Prospect Theory and Political Science," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 8 (June 2005), 1-21.

security interests. During the period of the late 1950's through 1967 known as the Arab Cold War, for instance, the United States and the Soviet Union competed for influence over Nasser's United Arab Republic (UAR), while Saudi Arabia was a U.S. security partner that opposed Soviet influence in the region.

I hypothesize that a potential intervener's relationship with great power patrons will also affect the decision to intervene. In short, due to their relative lack of resources, as well as the politicization of regional militaries for coup-proofing purposes, states in the region depend almost entirely on great powers to acquire and sustain their military capabilities.[54] When it comes to regional military interventions however, MENA states are even more dependent on their relationship with great powers because they lack the ability to systematically project force outside of their own borders without the substantial logistical assistance that great military powers can provide. If a great power provides logistical military support for an intervention, then intervention at a higher level on the scale is likely. However, when great powers chose to exert the leverage that they possess over a regional partner to push back against intervention, the regional state will be more likely to intervene at a lower level on the intervention scale.

In order to engage in and sustain a kinetic intervention outside of its own borders, a state requires a minimum threshold of power projection capabilities. Power projection or force projection is a state's ability "to apply all or some of its elements of national power—political, economic, informational, or military—to rapidly and effectively deploy and sustain forces in and from multiple dispersed locations to respond to crises, to contribute to deterrence, and to enhance regional stability."[55] However, militaries in the MENA region are systematically hindered by

[54] Iran is an exception to this, because it has not had a sustained mil-mil relationship with a great power since 1979. However, in order to compensate for this disadvantage, Iran has developed asymmetric military capabilities by investing in proxy relationships with groups like Hezbollah through the IRGC Quds Force.
[55] U.S. Department of Defense (2013), *The Dictionary of Military Terms*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing, p. 426

politicization, which most autocratic leaders deem important to the survival of their regime. Because states in the region tend to lack domestic legitimacy and are weakly institutionalized, and especially as part of efforts to stave of perennial coups through the 1940s through 1970s, leaders in the region have developed a coup-proofing approach to their own militaries to ensure their loyalty. As Kenneth Pollack notes, such coup-proofing methods include "skewing senior officer promotions and assignments to favor those loyal to the autocrat; creating multiple military and intelligence organizations that can watch one another and act against one another should one attempt a coup; restricting the freedom of action, and at times even the development of capabilities, to ensure that military units cannot move against the government; and centralizing, to the extent possible, all information and command authority with the political leadership."[56]

Additionally, for these reasons, when regimes do focus on building the capacity of their security institutions, these efforts tend to be inwardly rather than outwardly oriented in order to repress and surveil domestic populations to ensure regime survival. MENA states systematically engage in the creation of parallel military and security organizations within the state to balance against one another and to surveil the domestic population and engage in repressive measures against their own populations. While these politicization measures may protect the regime from its own security forces and popular opposition movements, they have corrosive effects on the military's ability to project power. Even when militaries in the region receive substantial support in terms of weapons technologies and financial resources from a great power, coup-proofing measures almost universally ensure that MENA militaries have "a military capability smaller than indicated by inventory counts of units or weapons. The units of the parallel military, armed

[56] Kenneth M. Pollack, "The Arab Militaries: The Double-Edged Swords," in *The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2011), 58.

with the best weapons, may not be readily available for military operations against external enemies…The positioning and chain of command of the parallel military units may not readily permit their application at the decisive point—that is, for operations against a foreign opponent."[57]

Very limited combat experience also further weakens MENA state's militaries.[58] Global military powers and regional military powers have significant differences in terms of "the range or distance at which operations can be conducted away from home territory; the ability both to surge for rapid intervention and to support enduring operational requirements over extended periods of time."[59] Global military powers possess capabilities including comprehensive, deployable combined-arms capabilities; full-spectrum capability at strategic range, including command-and-control assets; and comprehensive strategic (air and sea) mobility. In contrast, regional military powers possess only limited afloat and/or inflight strategic mobility support assets, and invest in territorial defense while possessing offensive capabilities only at a limited range.

Currently the United States is the only global military power, in a class of its own in terms of "its ability to deploy and sustain global deployments and maintain combat missions on land, at sea and in the air."[60] There are also several states with "expeditionary power" or the "proven ability to deploy limited capabilities at a strategic range…[but that are constrained] in their ability to project large-scale conventional power at continental range for a sustained period," including France, the UK, Russia, and China. Due to the constraints that they face in

[57] James T. Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), *International Security*, pp. 131-165, 165.
[58] The UAE's recent efforts to deploy its military abroad are a notable exception that proves the rule.
[59] Bastian Giegerich, Nick Childs, and James Hackett, "Military Capability and International Status," July 4, 2018, *International Institute for Strategic Studies Military Balance Blog*, https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2018/07/military-capability-and-international-status.
[60] Ibid.

terms of their power projection capabilities, MENA states require the logistical assistance of a global or expeditionary regional power to project force beyond their own borders in order to intervene directly.

While in some cases a great power patron could choose to provide logistical military assistance to support an intervention, in other cases it might choose to exert leverage via the foreign policy tool of coercive diplomacy to push back against an intervention.[61] Alexander George defines coercive diplomacy as seeking to "persuade an opponent to cease his [sic] aggression rather than bludgeon him into stopping. In contrast to the blunt use of force to repel an adversary, coercive diplomacy emphasizes the use of threats to punish the adversary if he does not comply with what is demanded of him. If force is used in coercive diplomacy, it consists of an exemplary use of quite limited force to persuade the opponent to back down."[62] The central goal of coercive diplomacy is "to create in the opponent the expectation of costs of sufficient magnitude to erode his motivation to continue what he is doing."[63]

However, while theories of coercive diplomacy tend to focus on how a state uses the threat of force to coerce an adversary, great powers may also use threats to exert coercive force on an ally, partner, or potential partner. There are limits to how much coercive pressure a great power can exert on a friend without straining or even changing the nature of the relationship itself, states can, and often do, use a variant of coercive diplomacy on friendly or neutral states. Privately issued threats and threats that do not directly involve the use of force—for example, to cut foreign aid or withdraw another existing form of support—is a common means for great powers to exert coercive pressure on friends. Conversely, great powers can offer inducements—

[61] Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion: American Foreign Policy and the Limits of Military Might*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15.
[62] Alexander L. George, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War*, (Washington, D.C.: US Institute of Peace Press, 1991), 5.
[63] George, *Forceful Persuasion*, 11.

such as the promise of aid or other forms of support—to persuade a friend or partner state to do something they might not otherwise do. As Byman and Waxman note, "The flipside of threatening an adversary with economic or political sanctions is the offering of inducements for compliance…Even as coercive pressure is being applied, coercers often use inducements to encourage cooperation and to ease implementation problems by allowing [the target] to 'save face.'"[64]

I refer to this variant of coercive diplomacy as "leverage." Leverage is the substance of a coercive threat or inducement. Great powers possess leverage over some states and not over others. It is especially difficult for a great power to offer an adversary something that they might reasonably be induced to accept, or a coercive threat that is compelling enough to deter an adversary from doing something they otherwise would have done. In fact, I argue that coercive diplomacy in the context of regional intervention in civil wars against friendly or neutral states is actually more likely to be effective than coercive diplomacy against adversaries. Attempts to coerce adversaries can have the unintended consequences of causing the adversary to double down on their position—for example, international sanctions may have inadvertently strengthened hardline factions within Iran, leading to stronger regime support for nuclear proliferation.

Military capabilities can be a source of coercive leverage for great powers to affect their partners' behavior when the great power possesses military capabilities that could be credibly used to achieve the coercing state's demands, or inflict sufficient punishment on the target. Credibility is key here: although great powers are almost always theoretically capable of inflicting significant damage on other states, whether they are likely to do so is conditioned by a number of factors including the strategic importance of the outcome and the great power's

[64] Byman and Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion*, 9.

military commitments elsewhere. For example, the Israeli military's conspicuous mobilization during the 1970 civil war in Jordan, with explicit coordination with the United States, was a source of coercive leverage over Syria. Additionally, military capabilities may serve as a source of leverage when they can provide desired benefits to the target state, or act as a more general signal of a great power's support. For example, the United States' provision of eight U.S. Air Force jet aircraft to a base in southern Saudi Arabia in 1963-64, known as *Operation Hard Surface*, was a source of coercive leverage because it was a signal of reassurance to Saudi Arabia of U.S. support that U.S. officials explicitly conditioned on Saudi behavior.

The fact that great powers are objectively more powerful than other states implies that coercive diplomacy should be easy and often successful. However, "many of the military assets that the United States and other strong powers can bring to the table often are of little or no utility against a particular adversary." The United States failed to coerce North Vietnam during the Vietnam War, and Israel failed to coerce Lebanese militias during its intervention in the Lebanese civil war. David Baldwin refers to this phenomenon as "the paradox of unrealized power."[65]

I hypothesize that a great power's use of leverage over a regional friend of neutral state makes a potential intervener more likely to intervene at the lower end of the ladder, rather than to prevent intervention all together. Great powers can often exert significant leverage over regional states, but regional states are likely to have escalation dominance—the ability to "impose, absorb, and deflect cost[s]" above what the coercer is willing to exert—because they have a more direct interest in the outcome of a civil war in their region, and often directly on their border,

[65] David A. Baldwin, "Power Analysis and World Politics: New Trends Versus Old Tendencies." *World Politics*, 31, vol. 2 (1979), 163.

than great powers have in containing the conflict and preventing intervention.[66] Therefore, even when a great power exerts leverage to prevent a regional state from intervening, that state is still likely to intervene to some degree. Additionally, indirect intervention is more likely because it is a less costly form of intervention, and also when attempted covertly, much easier to conceal and plausibly deny. It is much more difficult for a great power to confirm whether a regional state is engaging in indirect intervention, especially in civil war states where great power intelligence about such covert activity is likely to be limited. Table 1 outlines the theory's predicted outcomes.

Table 1: Predicted Outcomes

		Great power relationship	
		Leverage/no support	**Support**
Status anxiety	**Low**	No intervention [Iran 1962]	n/a
	High	Indirect [Iran 2015, Saudi 1962]	Direct/regular forces and airstrikes [Saudi, UAE, Qatar 2015; Egypt 1962, 2015]

I also consider alternative explanations for intervention, derived from the existing literature, related to sectarianism/ideology and domestic politics.

[66] Byman and Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion*, 39.

Alternative Explanation 1: Essentialist Sectarian and Ideological Orientation

The literature on ethnic conflict suggests that states may intervene on behalf of other states or non-state actors who share an ideological orientation or sectarian identity. There are several traditions of inquiry in the study of ethnic conflict. Ethnicity refers to a sense of collective belonging that is based on one or a combination of common descent, race, religion, culture, language, or history. Ethnicity differs conceptually from nationalism because the concept of the nation is associated with statehood, although ethnic groups without a state may have aspirations of statehood.[67]

Essentialist explanations for ethnic conflict, the oldest of this theoretical tradition, holds that ethnic categories are old and deeply-rooted, and that the primordialism of ethnic groups is a stronger motivator of conflict than modern concepts like ties to the state.[68] However, essentialist explanations ignore the ways in which different identities can be salient in different contexts, and fail to explain variation: if groups have hated each other since time immemorial, then why are they only sometimes engaged in fighting one another? Realist explanations of ethnic conflict are driven by the concept of the security dilemma: when a state collapses, relations among ethnic groups begin to resemble relations among states, and ethnic groups tend to mobilize out of fear to ensure that they are not harmed by another group.[69] Co-ethnics may therefore be more likely to intervene under conditions of threat.

Finally, instrumentalist explanations argue that ethnic identity is not inherent in human nature, but "masks a deeper core of interests, which are either economic or social."[70] According

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[67] Ashutosh Varshney, "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict," *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics* (2007); Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
[68] Walker Connor, "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?" *World Politics* 24, no. 3 (1972); Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in ed. Clifford Geertz, *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa* (New York: Free Press, 1963).
[69] Barry R. Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," *Survival* 35, no. 1 (1993).
[70] Varshney, "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict," 282.

to these explanations, ethnically-driven conflict occurs because leaders strategically manipulate ethnicity or sectarian identity for their own political ends. Ethnic identities may therefore serve as useful "focal points" for aligning the expectations of members of the group. Scholars have argued that entrepreneurial actors use ethnic identities instrumentally to mobilize certain groups to achieve their own political ends: Hardin, for example, demonstrates that ethnic conflict at the sub-state level can arise when leaders cultivate hatred of other groups in order to gain or hold on to political power.[71] Instrumentalist explanations are more agency-oriented than essentialist or realist explanations, emphasizing the malleable nature of identity.

Popular media sources (particularly in the West) tend to fall back on primordialist narratives around sectarianism as explanations for conflict in the Middle East. The sectarian narrative of intervention "treats the ancient conflict over the succession to the Prophet, which dates back to the seventh century between Sunni and Shia Muslims, as responsible" for much of the conflict that occurs in the region. Primordial "identities are then placed at the center of accounts of the historical evolution of the Middle East, with other influences downplayed or marginalized."[72] The implication of such sectarian narratives, combining primordial and realist accounts of ethnic conflict, is that the collapse of authoritarian states, whether in a coup in the earlier part of the 20th century or during the Arab Spring, lifts the metaphorical lid off of historic sectarian divisions, leading to sub-state conflict. Regional states therefore intervene in civil wars in order to protect their sectarian brethren and to support co-sectarian states and non-state actors. States may therefore also intervene on behalf of ideological fellow travelers: during the Arab Cold War, Nasser's UAR intervened on behalf of revolutionary states and actors, while Saudi

[71] Russell Hardin, "Self-Interest, Group Identity," in *Nationalism and Rationality*, eds., Alber Breton, Gianluigi Galeotti, Pierre Salmon, and Ronald Wintrope, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
[72] Paul Dixon, "Beyond Sectarianism in the Middle East? Comparative Perspectives on Group Conflict," in ed. Frederic Wehrey, *Beyond Sunni and Shia: The Roots of Sectarianism in a Changing Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 11.

Arabia, Hashemite Jordan, and other conservative monarchies intervened to support other monarchies. However, as Dixon notes, primordialist and ideological accounts alike are "essentialist in that they close off the possibility of changeable human behavior. These theories are structuralist because they emphasize the constraints that biology and culture place on the possibility for political change."[73] For this reason, these explanations fail to explain variation in intervention decisions across space and time.

I argue that instrumentalist accounts of ethnic conflict better explain regional intervention in civil wars in MENA. Instrumentalist accounts emphasize the role played by political elites in activating sectarian and ideological identities, arguing that leaders in the region exploit sectarian and ideological narratives in order to further their own political ends. Sectarian ties took on strategic significance in the 1980's, for example, when Syria aligned with Iran during the Iran-Iraq War and the founding of Hezbollah in Lebanon. "While confessional solidarity played a role" in both events, "it is important to highlight the strategic rationale underpinning them…the Alawites, to which the Asad family and some key political, military, and *mukhabarat* [secret police] figures belonged, were recognized as part of the Shia community only in the 1970s by the Lebanese Imam Musa al-Sadr, after a long-standing history of being labeled heretics."[74] To take another example, in the wake of the Arab Spring, the Sunni Gulf monarchies used sectarianism as a tool to undermine the emergence of a potential cross-sectarian, transnational revolutionary movement, adopting "the sectarian threat narrative as a key discourse to delegitimize popular protests."[75] Externally, the sectarian narrative was instrumentalized to isolate the Sunni Gulf monarchies' regional adversary, Iran, to mobilize Sunnis across the region, and to justify a

[73] Dixon, "Beyond Sectarianism," 17.
[74] Calculli and Legrenzi, "Middle East Security," 227.
[75] Toby Mattheison, *Sectarian Gulf : Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't*, (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2013), 23.

Saudi-led coalition's intervention in Bahrain in 2011, while Iran instrumentalized narratives around Shi'ia identity to support actors like the Assad regime in Syria and the Houthis in Yemen. However, this explanation indicates that sectarian and ideological identities serve as *tools* or by-products, rather than *causes*, of intervention decisions.

Alternative Explanation 2: Other Elements of Domestic Politics

Domestic politic dynamics in the intervening state could also explain intervention. First, the relationship between a regional state and the civil war state could inform this decision: a state may be more likely to intervene in support of an ally, or to support the opposition to an adversary.

Additionally, although theories about domestic veto players could explain intervention under some circumstances, I argue that these theories are not especially relevant for the universe of cases in MENA. Veto players are "individual or collective actors whose agreement is necessary for a change of the status quo."[76] This theory would suggest that more veto players present in a state makes policy more stable, because an actor would need to gather buy-in from each veto player in order to enact a policy change. Domestic constraints can inhibit a state from mobilizing for war, implying that a higher number of veto players makes intervention less likely.[77]

However, because the number of veto players preventing intervention is relatively stable across time in most regimes in the region, this theory does not explain variation in intervention decisions. Additionally, there tends to be few veto players in autocratic regimes in the region, especially in the Gulf monarchies where foreign policy decisions are made by one or a small

[76] George Tsebelis, *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 19
[77] David Lake, "Powerful Pacifist:; Democratic States and War," *American Political Science Review* 86, no. 1 (1992).

number of individuals. For instance, while the UAE is governed by a council of Emirs from all seven emirates, in practice foreign policy decisions are made by Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (known as MbZ), in consultation with his "Bani Fatima" faction of princes and Vice President Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashed Al Maktoum, with little consultation with a bureaucracy or agency process.[78] In Iran, the Supreme National Security Council, composed of the president, ministers of relevant agencies, and military leadership, votes on foreign policy-related decisions, but the supreme leader has the final say on important national security-related decisions and can overrule the council's vote. While these individuals are still compelled to appease various political constituencies and elite actors within the regime, the number of actors who can serve veto players is tends to be quite limited as compared to more deeply institutionalized states. However, in each case I explore who the key veto players are and what their preferences are when that information is available.

Domestic public opinion may also affect leaders' decision-making. While public opinion affects democratic leaders through clearly visible channels, autocratic leaders are also concerned with keeping their selectorate happy in order to survive in office.[79] Much of the existing literature on domestic politics and intervention decision-making is focused on U.S. intervention—it is therefore less clear what bearing these findings might have on decision-making in autocratic states, especially in the rentier autocracies of the MENA region. Nevertheless, this literature's findings do point to potential explanations for the extent of intervention by MENA states, both at the beginning of an intervention and over time as the intervention progresses.

[78] Khalid Almezaini, *The UAE and Foreign Policy: Foreign Aid, Identities, and Interests* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
[79] Sebastian Rosato, "The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory," *American Political Science Review*, 97, vol. 4 (2003).

There is a substantial literature exploring what is sometimes termed "Vietnam syndrome," or war weariness. Publics can become opposed to an intervention that generates a large number of casualties or other substantial costs that are visible to the public.[80] Leaders may therefore may be more likely to draw down or even end an intervention that is associated with high casualties and other costs. The public may be more likely to support an intervention that appears to have important national security implications or that appears to be successfully achieving its objectives.[81] This suggests that leaders may choose to continue or even double down on an intervention that appears to be succeeding and is therefore viewed favorably by public opinion. However, some studies have found that domestic constituents may be more likely to support an intervention when they are already supportive of the government in power.[82] This suggests a more instrumental Hypothesis: that leaders may seek to shape public opinion in a favorable way in order to shore up domestic support for an intervention.

The background, personality, and personal inclinations of individual leaders may also affect intervention decisions. Saunders has found, for example, that leaders' perception of what kind of threat a state poses, and more specifically whether the threat emanates from the internal characteristics of the state, affects whether that leader decides to intervene as well as the

[80] John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War*, (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Vol. 9, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954); Scott S. Gartner and Gary M. Segura, "War, Casualties, and Public Opinion," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42, No. 3 (June 1998); Jeffrey Pickering, "War-Weariness and Cumulative Effects: Victors, Vanquished, and Subsequent Interstate Intervention," *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 3, (May 2002).

[81] Bruce W. Jentleson, "The Pretty Prudent Public: Post Post-Vietnam American Opinion on the Use of Military Force," *International Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1, (March 1992); Richard C. Eichenberg, "Victory Has Many Friends: U.S. Public Opinion and the Use of Military Force, 1981–2005," *International Security* 30, no. 1, (Summer 2005); John H. Aldrich, et al. "Foreign Policy and the Electoral Connection," *Annual Review of Political Science*, no. 9 (2006).

[82] Eric V. Larson and Bogdan Savych, *American Public Support for US Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2005); Adam J. Berinsky, "Assuming the Costs of War: Events, Elites, and American Public Support for Military Conflict," *Journal of Politics*, 69, no. 4, (November 2007).

intervention strategy they choose to employ.[83] Unfortunately, the inclinations of individual leaders are often impossible to study in the MENA context, where state archives and personal papers are almost always unavailable to researchers, and access to an individual's thinking is typically strictly limited to a handful of people. However, where possible, in my research I rely on secondhand accounts of leaders' thinking and inclinations, including by scholars in the region. There are also specific cases in which more information is available. For example, Egyptian journalist Mohamed Hassanein Heikal was a close confidant of President Gamal Abdel Nasser who wrote several books and gave a number of interviews to scholars and journalists conveying his insider perspective on Nasser's regime. Finally, where possible I consult U.S. national security archives that include transcripts of meetings between regional heads of state and U.S. officials, which help to convey these leaders' privately expressed perspectives.

Domestic instability and succession dynamics in the potential intervener could affect intervention decisions. However, this theory does not point in a clear causal direction. On one hand, diversionary war theory suggests that leaders may be more likely to launch an intervention when they face domestic conditions that threaten their public support. Intervention may therefore serve as a distraction intended to encourage a patriotic "rally 'round the flag" effect.[84] Additionally, leaders could use intervention as an excuse to send their security forces abroad in order to forestall a coup attempt. Conversely, however, domestic instability could also make intervention less likely if leaders feel they need to keep their security forces at home in order to head off a revolution or to crack down on protestors. Domestic instability could also make it

[83] Elizabeth N. Saunders, *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).
[84] Empirical support for this theory is mixed: see James Meernik, "Domestic Politics and the Political Use of Military Force by the United States," *Political Research Quarterly* 54, no. 4, (December 2001); Karl DeRouen Jr and Jeffrey Peake, "The Dynamics of Diversion: The Domestic Implications of Presidential Use of Force," *International Interactions* 28, no. 2 (2002).

more difficult to mobilize military forces to deploy abroad, especially in militaries that are dominated by conscripts.

The cases of Saudi Arabia's intervention 1962 vs. 2015 illustrate the ambiguous causal direction of this explanation. In 1962, domestic instability limited Saudi leaders' willingness to intervene directly in the civil war in North Yemen, limiting the intervention to the provision of indirect support. In contrast, in 2015, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's attempts to consolidate his domestic authority made him more eager to intervene in the Yemen civil war as part of a coalition that has engaged in an air campaign as well as combat on the ground (see case studies for more).

For each case, when warranted, I also occasionally suggest additional hypotheses that are more relevant for a particular context or time period. These hypotheses may be found in the case study chapters themselves.

I outline the confirming or disconfirming evidence I look for with regards to each hypotheses in table 2, below.

Table 2: Expected Causal Process Observations

Hypotheses	*Confirming evidence*	*Disconfirming evidence*
Hypothesis 1: Status anxiety	Leaders state or believe that they have suffered a setback in terms of regional influence, or that recent events in the region are a setback to their strategic position Leaders cite such setbacks as linked to domestic stability Leaders express concerns that an opponent winning the civil war would be a further setback	Leaders believe they have made recent gains re: regional influence or see recent events in the region as beneficial to their position Leaders do not see outcome of conflict as having a significant effect on their domestic security
Hypothesis 2: Great power relationship	State possesses alternative capabilities (e.g. asymmetric vs. conventional) in order to facilitate intervention	State possess sufficient military capabilities to intervene beyond borders (but

	Great power leverage could have a substantial effect on regional state (e.g. foreign aid is critical to economic well-being, direct intervention not possible w/o logistical assistance) Interveners pull out when they are no longer capable of sustaining a military intervention	does not) Interveners do not react strongly to use of great power leverage Great power leverage would not have a substantial effect (e.g. foreign aid small part of economy, can sustain logistics of intervention w/o significant support)
Alternative 1: Sectarianism/ Ideology	Sectarian or ideological allegiances pre-date intervention Ideological or sectarian affinity between civil war party and intervener	Sectarian or ideological allegiances do not pre-date or are substantially altered by intervention Disjuncture between ideological or sectarian orientation of civil war party and intervener

Table 2 (cont.)

Hypotheses	*Confirming evidence*	*Disconfirming evidence*
Alternative 2: Domestic Politics	States lessen intervention or withdraw when costs (financial, casualties) become high State doubles down on/sustains intervention when it appears to be achieving its objectives State lessen intervention or withdraw when intervention does not appear to be achieving stated objectives Individual decision-makers are known to support intervention bc of their background/experience	Costs and casualties are employed instrumentally by the state Public does not (or is politically unable) to pressure state to withdraw State doubles down on or does not lessen intervention when costs and/or casualties are high State doubles down on/sustains intervention even when it is not achieving

		strategic objectives

Scope Conditions

The scope of this study is bounded by three considerations: it is limited to the Middle East and North Africa region, or MENA; it analyzes the years between 1957 and 2018; and it looks specifically at intervention in ongoing civil wars. First, I define MENA as being constituted by Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Potential interveners are limited to countries in this region, as are the civil wars that are intervened in (or not). While I expect that similar dynamics characterize civil war intervention in other regions of the world in the 20th and 21st centuries, the theory would have to be adapted in some ways to these different regional contexts.

I exclude Israel from this list because I am specifically interested in building an international systemic theory of intervention, and while Israel has intervened in civil wars in the region, and it is certainly a regional power in relative military terms, it does not participate in the dynamics of regional competition in the same way as the Arab countries as well as Iran and Turkey do.[85]

Second, the study is confined to the years 1957 through 2018. It begins in 1957 because this year signifies broader shifts in the region: the emergence of a modern state system as colonial influence receded gradually between the end of World War II and the early 1970's; the emergence of regional competition, as other states were threatened by Nasser's rise and as the Eisenhower Doctrine accelerated the division of the region between the royalists and the

[85] Fawcett, *International Relations of the Middle East*, 199.

revolutionary states that (in theory) rejected Western support; and the beginning of U.S.-Soviet competition in the region as British and French left a vacuum.

Although Great Britain and France's colonial presence in the region gradually receded over the course of the century through Great Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf that took place between 1964 and 1971, the 1956 Suez Crisis marked a critical moment in decolonization, and therefore the process of modern state formation, in the region.[86] In July 1956, following several months of rising political tensions, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company that had been jointly owned by Britain and France since the construction of the canal in 1869. In October 1956, after coordinating with the British and French governments, Israel attacked Egyptian forces in the Sinai Peninsula, and under the pretext of protecting the canal, French and British troops landed a few days later. However, under pressure from the Eisenhower administration, Britain and France agreed to a UN ceasefire in November. The resolution of the crisis was "perceived as a victory of Arab nationalism over Western imperialism, and was received with great enthusiasm throughout the Arab world."[87] Although the process of decolonization and modern state formation was already underway and would continue through the 1960's in the Gulf, Nasser's victory marked a critical moment in the decolonization of the region. It also accelerated the decolonization process, playing an important role in the British decision to withdraw from the Gulf over the next decade or so.

The Suez Crisis of 1956 also elevated the profile of Nasser's Arab socialist ideology across the region, leading to a period dubbed the Arab Cold War by western scholars (see

[86] Simon C. Smith, "Britain's Decision to Withdraw from the Persian Gulf: A Pattern Not a Puzzle," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 44, no. 2 (2016).
[87] Elie Podeh, "The Struggle Over Arab Hegemony After the Suez Crisis," *Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 1 (1993): 91-110, p. 92.

chapter 3 for more).[88] It led to a gradual realignment across the region, as revolutionary governments tended to side with Nasser while conservative monarchies, fearing the spread of revolutionary ideologies, balanced against the new revolutionary regimes. This marked the beginning of different axes of competition and balancing behavior across the region that evolved subsequently though the present day.

Finally, 1957 marked the beginning of U.S. and Soviet competition in the region. In January 5, 1957, President Eisenhower addressed a joint session of Congress warning that the region was in danger of falling under Soviet influence, and that the U.S. must do all it could to prevent this by assisting states in the region. Eisenhower asked Congress to pass legislation increasing economic and military aid to the region and extending the umbrella of U.S. protection to any MENA state willing to acknowledge the danger of international communism. The Eisenhower Doctrine "marked America's emergence as the dominant Western power in the Middle East, a role the United States continued to play long after the policy itself had been abandoned."[89] According to historian Salim Yaqub, the Suez Crisis was the direct catalyst of the Eisenhower Doctrine: "As a result of this fiasco, Britain was widely regarded as having forfeited its status as the preeminent Western power in the Middle East," and Eisenhower and his influential Secretary of State John Foster Dulles believed that this left a "vacuum" in the region that would be filled by the Soviet union if the U.S. did not become more involved. Eisenhower and Dulles feared that Arab nationalist regimes would by inclined towards Soviet-style communism and that the United States must therefore actively engage in winning over regional

[88] Gordon Martel, "Decolonisation After Suez: Retreat or Rationalisation?" *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 46, no. 3 (2000); Anthony Gorst and Lewis Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* (London: Routledge, 2013); Rashid Khalidi, "Consequences of the Suez Crisis in the Arab World," in eds. W.R. Louis and R. Owen, Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
[89] Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2004): 1

regimes to counter Soviet influence.[90] The Eisenhower Doctrine led to the U.S. intervention in Lebanon in 1958 to support the western-oriented regime and to an increase in aid to Jordan the following year. The Eisenhower Doctrine "signaled a new level of U.S. resolve to exert influence in international affairs" and marked an acceptance of "responsibilities in the region that the United States would retain for decades to come."[91]

In the same timeframe, the Soviet Union also began to focus increasingly on competition in the MENA region, as well as the rest of the "Third World," a shift that is generally attributed to Khrushchev's leadership. In the Middle East, this led to initiatives in 1953 and 1954 to ease tensions with Turkey and Iraq, and an arms deal with Nasser's Egypt in 1955. U.S. and Soviet initiatives in the region intertwined with the regional dynamics of competition kicked off by the Suez Crisis to intensify regional competition, and elevated the importance of bilateral relationships between the two superpowers and countries in the region. By the mid- to late-1950's, the Soviet Union was for every Middle Eastern state "at least a possible alternative to the West…. The Suez crisis and the credit and prestige which both the Soviet Union and Abdel Nasser gained from it (largely thanks to the United States) put increasing pressure on Arab governments still friendly to the West, concerned about Soviet penetration, and suspicious of Nasser."[92]

Finally, I confine the study to intervention in civil wars that are already in progress prior to the beginning of the third party intervention. While I expect that there are theoretical similarities between intervention in civil wars and other types of military interventions, this allows me to hone the scope of the research to compare like cases with like. Additionally,

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[90] Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism,* 1.
[91] Peter L. Hahn, "Securing the Middle East: The Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2006): 38.
[92] John C. Campbell, "The Soviet Union and the Middle East: In the General Direction of the Persian Gulf: Part I," *The Russian Review* 29, no. 2 (1970): 250.

looking only at cases of intervention would introduce bias by selecting only positive values of the dependent variable. Focusing specifically on ongoing civil wars provides a clear definition of a negative value of the dependent variable: civil wars in which states could have intervened but chose not to.

Methods

Process Tracing

This research uses structured, focused case studies. This method involves generating a set of questions that is asked of each of the cases under study, thereby conducting a systematic comparison of the cases, with a focus on the particular aspects of each case that are informed by the hypothesized theories.

In each case study (see below for case selection), I use process tracing to carefully link the hypothesized variables to outcomes through intervening steps, looking for observable implications of each step.[93] Process tracing is a "method [that] attempts to identify the intervening causal process—the causal chain and causal mechanism—between and independent variable (or variables) and the outcome or the dependent variable."[94] Process tracing is useful for analyzing data with regards to causal mechanisms or intervening variables, which are the "ultimately unobservable physical, social, or psychological processes through which agents with causal capacities operate, but only in specific contexts or conditions, to transfer energy, information, or matter to other entities."[95]

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[93] Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 64.
[94] Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 206.
[95] George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 137.

There are distinct analytical challenges in particular in measuring the effects of the use of leverage on intervention outcomes.[96] Actors who participate in these diplomatic relationships are necessarily biased. Great power policymakers are likely to publicly claim credit when the outcome is in their interests, and to disown outcomes that do not align with their interests. Even when policymakers are telling the 'truth' as they see it and attempting to objectively asses an outcome, they are likely to over-estimate the effects of their behavior due to their position. In contrast, policymakers in regional states are more likely to *publicly downplay* the effects of leverage from great powers on their behavior and decision-making, unless they are actively trying to win concessions for their behavior. In such cases, by contrast, they are more likely to *overstate* the effect of a great power's behavior on their decision-making to ensure that they receive such concessions, even if they would have behaved similarly in the absence of the exertion of great power leverage.

I take several steps in my case study analysis to counteract some of these challenges by using process tracing and triangulating amongst different sources of data. First, correlation between an independent variable and dependent variable is not sufficient evidence to demonstrate a causal relationship, correlation is an important first step in determining whether there is a causal relationship between an explanatory and dependent variable. My research demonstrates correlation across cases between the exertion of great power leverage and the extent of a regional state's intervention. I also investigate, to the extent that it is possible, whether what policymakers say behind the scenes or after leaving office indicates their belief in a causal relationship. While this is not a perfect metric, these sorts of assessments are more likely to be accurate than public statements made at the time of the intervention decision. For the two

[96] Bruce W. Jentleson and Christopher A. Whytock, "Who "Won" Libya? The Force-Diplomacy Debate and its Implications for Theory and Policy," *International Security* 30, vol. 3 (2006): 47.

historical cases, I also look at U.S. intelligence assessments from the period through the CIA CREST archive and other archival sources, as well as private discussions between great power and regional state policymakers from the time. In each case, I also attempt to locate sources that are more likely to take a critical approach towards official government statements, and explicitly balance these sources against the views of government officials. For the two historical cases, I consult the work of historians and other secondary sources for this purpose. For the modern-day cases, I interviewed a number of experts and members of the advocacy community that take a more critical approach, as well as consulting critical secondary sources.

Vulnerability to coercion may also determine whether a great power attempts to use leverage to begin with—for example, although the Regan administration considered Syria and Iran to be greater supporters of terrorism, it chose Libya as a target of coercion in 1985-1986 because it appeared more vulnerable to U.S. leverage.[97] In order to limit such selection as a source of potential bias in this study, in the case studies, I only look at great powers that possess some form of leverage vis-à-vis the regional state. In each case, I explicitly articulate that source of leverage, and then ask whether or not the great power attempts to use that leverage and to what effect.

Research Approach/Methods for 1962-67 Cases

For the three historical cases (Saudi Arabia, the UAR, and Iran in North Yemen, 1962-67), I conducted archival research at the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Libraries, as well as the UK Kew National Archives.[98] The National Security Papers at both presidential libraries provided U.S. policymakers' assessments of the leadership of the UAR and Saudi Arabia on their place in the dynamics of regional competition, both through direct

[97] George, *Forceful Persuasion*, 53.
[98] I thank the Cosmos Scholars Foundation for their generous support for this research.

meetings with these leaders and through intelligence assessments. Additionally, they shed light on the interactions between both the UAR and Saudi Arabia and the United States, including U.S. senior policymakers' intentions regarding their own policies towards both countries as well as their assessments of how these policies affected UAR and Saudi decision-making. The primary research for this chapter is necessarily weighted towards the U.S. perspective for this reason.

However, I did not rely solely on U.S. policymakers' perspectives, but triangulated these findings with other sources. Due to logistical and safety concerns, I was not able to access archives in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or Yemen, and I did not have access to Soviet archives due to linguistic and resource constraints. However, I consulted an extensive amount of secondary literature, including two invaluable international histories of the civil war in North Yemen: Jesse Ferris' *Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power*, and Asher Orkaby's *The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1968*. Both historians had access to Egyptian and Soviet archives, and conducted interviews with Egyptian officials who were close to UAR President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Other important secondary sources include biographies of Nasser and Saudi Crown Prince (later King) Faisal, accounts of UAR officials who were close to Nasser and familiar with his thinking, journalistic accounts from the period, as well as scholarly political science work by Michael Barnett, F. Gregory Gause, Kristian Ulrichsen, and many others with a depth of knowledge of the politics of the region.

Research Approach/Methods for 2015+ Cases

To research the five modern cases (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, the UAE, and Qatar in Yemen beginning in 2015), I conducted a total of 55 interviews between November 2017 and November 2018, in the Washington, D.C. area from November 2017 to March 2018; London in August 2017; Doha, Qatar in April 2018; and Cambridge, MA from September through November 2018.[99] Due to logistical, financial and safety concerns, I was not able to travel to other countries of interest, such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran, but many of the experts I interviewed in Washington, DC and in Doha had met with officials from these countries and were able to reflect extensively on their perspectives. I consulted primary sources including interview transcripts with the leadership of states in the region, especially Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and opinion pieces written in Arabic language media sources that are owned by or affiliated with the views of the Saudi state (translations of quotations from these pieces are my own unless otherwise noted). Additionally, I consulted an extensive secondary literature on both of these civil wars. Because the events I analyze here are so recent, much of this research comes from think tanks and popular media, although some scholarly sources are available. I also consulted journalistic sources extensively for this reason.

Case Selection

Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, the UAE, and Qatar constitute this project's main case studies. These states were selected because all three play a major role in the politics of the region; understanding their foreign policies is therefore critical to understanding the international

[99] I am grateful for the Georgetown University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Dissertation Travel Grant and the Project on Middle East Politics Science TRE Grant. Both provided generous support for this research. I am also grateful for the support of the Middle East Initiative of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School and for the feedback that I received from colleagues at several presentations there in spring 2019. I also presented my work in progress at a brownbag lunch at the Brookings Institute-Doha in April 2018, and I am grateful for the feedback I received there.

relations of the Middle East. Additionally, each has a varied history of intervening in Yemen, providing variation on the study's dependent variable. The cases selected provide variation across time and geographical space, as well as variation in the key explanatory and dependent variables. At the same time, comparing cases that occur in the same civil war locations at different moments in time holds several contextual variables constant while limiting variation to several key variables.

Yemen's Geo-Political Significance

As articulated above, my theory explains not *why* MENA states intervene in civil wars (or at least, not why leaders say they intervene), but the conditions under which such interventions are more or less likely. MENA states have intervened often in civil wars in Yemen due to Yemen's geo-political significance.

Yemen's location along the southern end of the Red Sea gives it outsized geopolitical significance, especially in a modern context. Oil tankers pass Yemen's coast on the way from the Middle East through the Suez Canal and on to Europe, one of the most important global trade routes for oil. Additionally, Yemen's ports are positioned at the confluence of other key global trade routes that traverse the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean. The 30 kilometer-wide Bab al-Mandab, at the intersection of the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, is one of the busiest potential chokeholds in global shipping. Control over Yemen's Red Sea ports therefore has significant implications for global trade. Global and regional powers that are able to position themselves as mediators of these commons play an important role in the MENA

region's geo-political landscape. Access to the Hodeidah Port on Yemen's Red Coast "is viewed as essential to securing maritime trade between Asia and Europe."[100]

The 1962-70 North Yemeni Civil War: Summary of the Conflict

"This peanut war will be with us a long time yet"-Robert Komer, senior official in the Kennedy administration, on the civil war in north Yemen[101]

On September 26, 1962, a military coup led by Abdullah al-Sallal displaced Imam Al-Badr, the heir to the thousand-year-old Yemeni Imamate who had succeed his father just 6 days earlier. Although Al-Badr was presumed dead after the royal palace was destroyed during the coup, he fled across the border to Saudi Arabia where he was able to rally support and launch a military campaign in an attempt to reclaim the throne. Sallal's forces were inspired by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's revolutionary Free Officers movement, and Sallal's coalition, known as the republicans, was made up of fellow army officers as well as members of the southern Shafi'i tribes, disaffected members of the northern Zaydi tribes, and some merchants. Al-Badr's forces, called the royalists, included many of the northern Zaydi tribes, as well as Yemenis who opposed Egyptian interference in Yemen.[102] The civil war quickly drew regional intervention: within a week of the coup, the UAR had deployed troops and supplies to support the new regime, called the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), and the republican forces, while Saudi Arabia and Jordan provided funding for the royalists. Britain also provided covert support for the royalists.

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[100] Hanieh, "Ambitions of a Global Gulf," 24.
[101] Memo from Thomas L. Hughes, State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, June 7, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 208a, Folder: Yemen General, 6/63, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (JFK).
[102] Jesse Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 30.

The north Yemen civil war saw the first major troops-on-the-ground intervention by a country in the MENA region, with Egypt deploying more than half of Egypt's total ground forces at one point during the conflict. Nasser later referred to the intervention as "my Vietnam" in recognition of its high cost to the UAR and the failure of Nasser's nation-building efforts in the YAR.[103] The conflict also saw one of the first large-scale documented uses of chemical weapons since World War I.[104]

While it began as a localized conflict over control of the Yemeni state, the 1962 civil war almost immediately became a battleground in the competition for regional hegemony between Nasser and his revolutionary Arab socialist allies on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia and their coalition of conservative monarchies on the other. Dana Schmidt, a journalist who reported extensively from Yemen during the war, wrote that the war in Yemen "has been fought—and the Yemenis have been gassed—only partly because of Yemen. More of the struggle has been due to the rivalry between Egypt and Saudi Arabia."[105] What otherwise might have remained a localized dispute became a regional war that lasted more than seven years, and that threatened to draw the United States and Soviet Union into a direct confrontation at a time when Cold War tensions were at a peak. Additionally, although it was a major regional conflict at the time, the civil war in north Yemen has since been under-studied in both the political science and history literatures.

[103] Victoria Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 95.
[104] Asher Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962-68* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 130.
[105] Dana Adams Schmidt, *Yemen: The Unknown War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968), 272-3.

The 2015-2018 Yemeni Civil War: Summary of the Conflict

The civil war in Yemen officially began after Houthi forces took over the capital Sana'a in 2014, but the conflict had its roots in the 2011 Arab Spring protests. The Arab Spring reached Yemen in January 2011, when university students marched in the streets of Sana'a and Taiz. The protests came on top of the ongoing Houthi insurgency in the north and a secessionist movement in the south, as well as increased fractionalization within the regime over the previous decade. The protests, which brought Yemen's youth into the streets to protest the regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, were the precipitating event that set off long-awaited change in Yemen's ruling regime.

After 51 protestors were killed by security forces in March 2011 and senior military leaders defected to the opposition, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—backed by the United States, the EU, and the UN—brokered the Gulf Initiative in late November 2011. Under the terms of the deal, President Saleh resigned and was replaced by his Vice President Adeb-Rabbo Mansour Hadi, but in exchange Saleh was allowed to remain in the country. Hadi officially became president after uncontested elections were held in February 2012. A two-year political transition process followed, including a National Dialogue Conference (NDC). The NDC concluded in January 2014, producing a set of principles that were supposed to guide constitutional reform.

In the meantime, as the NDC process wore on, the military balance of power in the north had shifted as the Houthis, assisted by Saleh's supporters in the military, skirmished with government forces and Islamist fighters. In September 2014, Houthi forces marched on Sana'a and seized the city. Saleh's supporters, who had formed a pragmatic alliance with the Houthis after Saleh was forced to step down, effectively stood aside and allowed the Houthis to enter

Sana'a. The Houthis set up their own shadow government to oversee the work of the Hadi government's ministries and eventually arrested Hadi, prompting his resignation in January 2015. Hadi then fled south to Aden and retracted his resignation, and in response the Houthis appointed their own revolutionary council to govern and marched south towards Aden in March 2015.

On March 26, 2015, Saudi Arabia and a coalition of nine other Arab states, with logistical support from the United States as well as from the UK and France, launched an intervention on behalf of Hadi's government that aimed to push back the Houthis and re-instate Hadi's government in Sana'a. In practice, the coalition has been led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE; Qatar participated until June 2017, when Qatar withdrew from the Yemen coalition following a diplomatic crisis initiated by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and regional allies.

Both sides of the fighting in Yemen are loosely connected coalitions of political parties, insurgent groups, and smaller militias that are organized around alliances of convenience rather than any strongly held mutual interests or values. Houthi forces were aligned with the remainder of Saleh's supporters, including significant factions of Yemen's military, until Saleh attempted to defect and was killed in December 2017. The Houthis have received indirect support from Iran and Hezbollah since at least the beginning of the conflict, although the precise level of support is difficult to determine. The anti-Houthi coalition, nominally led by Hadi's government, consists of southern separatist militias, Salafi Islamists, and other tribal and regionally-based adversaries of the Houthis. A January 2017 report by the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen found that the different sides to the conflict are so fragmented that "instead of one large war, in which various military units work towards a common, overarching goal, the conflict in Yemen comprises

several smaller wars with local commanders pursuing their own agendas."[106] Analyst Peter Salisbury has described Yemen as a "chaos state."[107]

[106] United Nations Security Council, Panel of Experts on Yemen, *Final report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen in accordance with paragraph 6 of resolution 2266 (2016)*, S/2018/193, New York: UN Security Council, January 27, 2017, 18.
[107] Peter Salisbury, *Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order* (London: Chatham House, 2017).

Chapter 2: Saudi Arabia

Case Study 1: North Yemen Civil War, 1962-67

During the civil war in north Yemen in 1962-'67, the United Arab Republic—Saudi Arabia's chief regional rival—deployed up to 70,000 troops to support the revolutionary government and even repeatedly bombed Saudi towns near the border with Yemen. Saudi and U.S. officials worried that the UAR's military presence in Yemen could provide a platform for President Nasser's efforts to foment instability within Saudi Arabia, and for the Soviet Union to expand its influence in the region. In spite of this acute security threat, Saudi Arabia provided indirect support in the form of weapons and funding to the insurgency against the new government, but did not intervene militarily. In contrast, after the Houthis, who have received support from Iran, took over the government of Yemen, Saudi Arabia led a coalition of countries in 2015 into a bombing campaign, naval blockade, and the eventual deployment of troops into Yemen, generating a massive security and humanitarian crisis. What explains the variation in Saudi Arabia's response to civil wars on its southern border? In the first part of this chapter, I seek to explain why Yemen's neighbor Saudi Arabia did not intervene directly in spite of the security threat posed by the UAR and Soviet Union's military presence.

Why did Saudi Arabia, which shared a border with Yemen, provide only indirect support to the royalists? I argue that my two hypotheses explain this puzzle. First, Saudi Arabia intervened in the civil war according to the logic of status anxiety. Saudi Arabia's leadership was deeply threatened by what appeared to be a rising tide of Nasser-inspired revolutionary coups in the region, including several coups in Syria, an apparent coup attempt in Jordan in 1956, the Iraq coup against a Hashemite monarchy, and instability in Lebanon in 1958. By decreasing Saudi Arabia's relative status in the region, the succession of coups against conservative monarchies in

the region also threatened the Saudi regime by encouraging potential revolutionaries in Saudi Arabia.

The coup in Yemen therefore represented the latest in a series of losses for Saudi Arabia in terms of its regional status, and intervention on behalf of the royalists was seen as a means of averting further losses in status by providing support for another monarchy. Second, Saudi Arabia's intervention decision was affected by Saudi Arabia's relationship with the United States. U.S. officials exerted significant leverage over their Saudi client to prevent Saudi Arabia from escalating their involvement in Yemen. That leverage existed in large part because of the military capacity that the United States provided to Saudi Arabia, including through Operation Hard Surface (described below).

Between the beginning of the conflict and 1964, U.S. officials directly pressured Saudi Arabia to stay out of the conflict, and were successful in getting Saudi Arabia to temporarily shut off most aid to the royalists in 1963. When the Johnson administration came into office in November 1963, concerns in Saudi Arabia arose around the steadfastness of the U.S. security commitment to defending Saudi Arabia from UAR aggression if the Saudis continued to fund the royalists. U.S. officials also offered the possibility of a large UK-U.S. air defense package, negotiated over the second half of 1965.

Uncertainty about the U.S. commitment to Saudi defense and the possibility of the military aid package helps explain why King Faisal was willing to engage in negotiations with Nasser, his chief regional rival, over the course of 1964 and most of 1965. However, after the Anglo-American military aid package was announced in December 1965, Saudi Arabia began to stall in the negotiations with Nasser, and King Faisal worked to build an anti-Nasser coalition of

conservative Arab states. These moves antagonized Nasser and contributed to the end of the Arab détente period by early 1966.

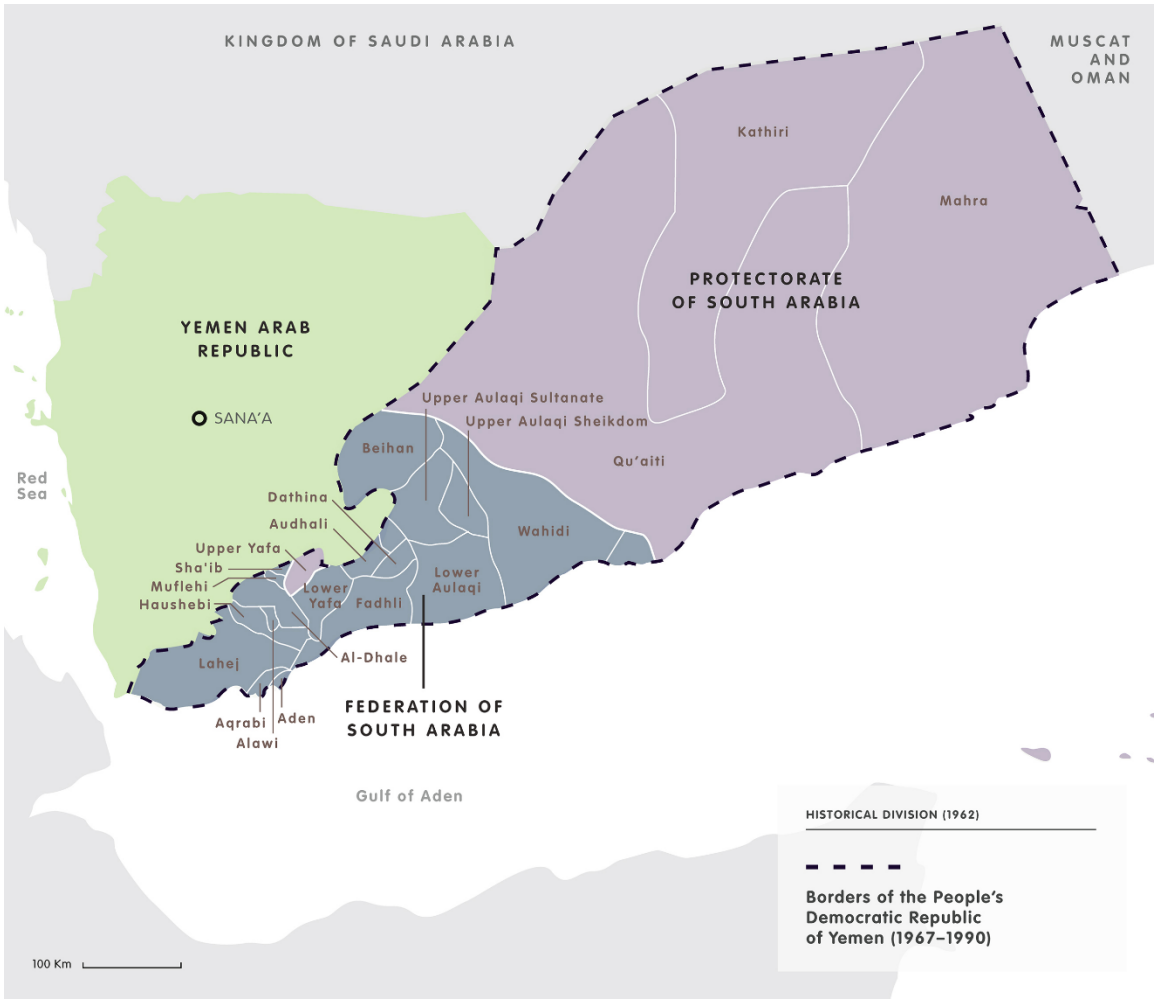

Figure 2. Map of Yemen, 1962

Source: The European Council on Foreign Relations, "Mapping the Yemen Conflict," http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen

Hypothesis 1: Status Anxiety

Although Saudi Arabia had signed a military pact with Nasser's UAR in 1955, by 1957 Saudi Arabia's leadership increasingly viewed Nasser and his revolutionary movement as a

threat to their influence in the region. Nasser's rise, including his campaign against the Baghdad Pact (i.e., CENTO) and his victory in the Suez Crisis in 1956, inspired fear in the monarchical regimes of the region, leading to a "historical reconciliation" of the Hashemite monarchies and Saudi Arabia after 1956.[108] The leaders of all states in the MENA region were domestically vulnerable due to their lack of popular legitimacy, rooted in a shallow historical political tradition; their authoritarian nature; and a proclivity to use violent crackdowns as a tactic of political control. As a result, these leaders "shared a remarkable sense of vulnerability and a similar preoccupation with domestic stability."[109]

This sense of vulnerability was heightened by Nasser's attempts to use Egyptian media and rhetoric to appeal directly to the citizens of other Arab countries and to foment revolution in rival states.[110] In Saudi, following Nasser's regional successes, "pro-Nasser and Arab nationalist sentiments swelled among the urban public and the educated elite."[111] The Egyptian Voice of the Arabs Radio launched an anti-Saudi propaganda campaign calling for the overthrow of the monarchy, and Cairo allowed an organization called the Saudi National Liberation Front, headed by the leader of an oil worker's strike in 1956, to form in Cairo.[112] There were pro-Nasser uprisings amongst troops stationed in Taif in 1955 and in Dhahran in 1956, and an Aramco strike with protestors shouting pro-Nasser slogans in 1956; all were put down violently by the Saudi state.[113]

Nasser's success in the region therefore provoked status anxiety amongst the conservative monarchies of the region, led by Saudi Arabia. Nasser's success, from the

[108] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 9.
[109] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble,* 14-15.
[110] Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics,* 2-3; Podeh, *The Quest for Hegemony in the Arab World,* 223.
[111] Nadav Safran, *Saudi Arabia: the Ceaseless Quest for Security* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 85.
[112] Safran, *Saudi Arabia,* 87.
[113] Aburish, *Nasser*, 146.

perspective of Saudi leadership, undermined their own regional status, and therefore the domestic stability of their regimes. It also directly threatened their influence in the region, however, as one conservative regime after the other began to fall to revolutionary movements. The Egyptian revolution that brought Nasser's Free Officer Movement to power in 1952 was followed by a series of coups in Syria that eventually brought a Ba'athist regime to power, a revolution in Algeria beginning in 1952, an apparent coup attempt in Jordan in 1956, a coup in Iraq in 1958 and Qasim's subsequent attempt to annex Kuwait, threats to the pro-western government in Lebanon that led the president to invite U.S. military intervention in 1958, and the formation of the UAR in 1958.[114] The coup in Iraq, when revolutionary forces overthrew the Hashemite monarchy, was particularly seen by the conservative regimes as a major turning point in the regional balance of power.[115] From the perspective of Saudi leaders, "The Qasim nationalist vision called for the removal of all Arab monarchies and, in the case of Saudi Arabia, to carve up the kingdom into smaller entities."[116]

Furthermore, after the *infisal* in 1962 (see Chapter X), Nasser famously adopted the slogan "unity of purpose" (*wahdat al-hadaf*), where purpose meant 'revolution.' This rhetorical shift signaled a change in Nasser's regional goals, replacing his pan-Arabism quest, which was relatively benign towards the conservative regimes, to a mission of fomenting revolution, which was much more directly threatening. Araham Sela, a historian of the Middle East, calls the new slogan "tantamount to a declaration of indiscriminate war against [Nasser's] Arab rivals."[117]

Additionally, the Eisenhower Doctrine, a policy first articulated by President Eisenhower in January 1957, divided the region into conservative regimes (including Saudi Arabia, Jordan,

[114] Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 458.
[115] Westad, *The Cold War*, 455.
[116] Joseph A. Kechichian, *Faysal: Saudi Arabia's King for all Seasons* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 69.
[117] Quoted in Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 27.

Iraq, Lebanon, and Kuwait) supported by the United States, placing them in counter-balance to Nasser's revolutionary movement. Under the terms of the Eisenhower Doctrine, the United States offered to "secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid, against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by International Communism," a thinly veiled reference to Nasser's Egypt.[118] The Eisenhower Doctrine contributed to the polarization of the region by facilitating U.S. support to counter the revolutionary regimes, both directly, for example in the case of the U.S. military intervention in Lebanon in 1958, and indirectly by providing support to conservative regimes and framing them as a counter-weight to the revolutionary states.[119]

The coup in Yemen posed an additional threat to Saudi regional status. From the perspective of Saudi leadership, the survival of the YAR regime would constitute an additional loss to Saudi regional status—not because Saudi Arabia was particularly close to the Imamate, but because the republicans were directly supported by the UAR, Saudi Arabia's chief regional rival.[120] The coup in Yemen was "a historical turning point for Saudi Arabia because a fellow monarchy was replaced."[121] The UAR's support for the YAR turned a relatively harmless neighbor into an enemy that played into Nasser's narrative about the strength of the Arab socialist revolution, and that the UAR could use as a base "to extend material support to opposition forces throughout the Peninsula."[122] Accordingly, Saudi Arabia's primary goal

[118] Quoted in Rachel Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006),73.
[119] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War,* 23.
[120] Gregory F. Gause, *Saudi-Yemeni Relations: Domestic Structures and Foreign Influence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 59.
[121] Kechician, *Faysal,* 71.
[122] Gause, *Saudi-Yemeni Relations*, 59.

throughout the civil war in Yemen was to expel the UAR military presence in Yemen; "all other goals, including a royalist restoration in North Yemen, were secondary."[123]

The conservative regimes saw the Yemen coup as the latest step in the inexorable progress of the revolutionary movement in the region. In early October 1962, Saudi Prince Faisal, the de facto head of the Saudi government, conveyed to U.S. diplomats his deep concern that if "Nasser succeeds in pulling off [the] coup in Yemen, then he will be encouraged to go on with plans to overthrow other governments," a prospect at which Faisal appeared "very distressed."[124]A day earlier, the Jordanian Prime Minister had summoned the U.S. ambassador to express concern that "a Nasser-Communist takeover [of Yemen] could not fail to encourage similar elements in Saudi Arabia, Syria, Kuwait and Iraq with consequent unfortunate effects on [the] general stability of [the] area."[125] The presence of a large number of UAR troops on their border, as well as airstrikes within Saudi territory, also posed a threat to the regime's stability, at least according to Saudi leadership, who believed that UAR airstrikes "sought to create a state of unrest in Saudi Arabia to lend credibility to widespread rumors that the monarchy was close to collapse. The borders of the kingdom were never this exposed."[126]

An anecdote from U.S. diplomatic cables illustrates the extent to which the leaders of the conservative regimes saw the Yemeni coup as a loss for their regional status, and therefore as a direct security threat. In November 1962, the U.S. ambassador to Jordan delivered a personal message from President Kennedy to Jordanian King Hussein, stating that the United States planned to formally recognize the YAR. The King reacted dramatically, "speaking softly but

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[123] Gause, *Saudi-Yemeni Relations*, 57.
[124] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Stevenson), October 3, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 10/1/62-10/8/62, JFK Library.
[125] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Lewis), October 2, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 10/1/62-10/8/62, JFK Library.
[126] Kechician, *Faysal,* 73.

with overtones in [a] voice of sadness, fatigue and muted anger." As the ambassador took his leave, "Hussein looked out [a] window and said quietly, 'I wonder who will be next, King Saud or me?'", implying his belief that the Jordanian or Saudi monarchies would be next to fall to Nasser's revolution. Of course, some of the drama of King Hussein's reaction is diplomatic theater. However, the U.S ambassador judged at the time that the remark "was not [a] contrived statement spoken for calculated effect but rather [a] genuine reflection [of] his mood at that moment."[127]

King Faisal and the leaders of other conservative regimes therefore believed that they had experienced a series of recent losses in the region in terms of their status due to the success of Nasser's revolution. Additionally, they believed that a victory by the Republican forces in the Yemen civil war would constitute an additional loss threat to their status.

Hypothesis 2: Great Power Relationships

One key explanation for the lack of a more forceful Saudi intervention was the relative weakness of Saudi military capabilities. Specifically, morale amongst Saudi military officers was low, and Saudi leadership was concerned about the loyalty of the officer corps. These concerns were heightened when two Saudi air force crews defected to the UAR in the first weeks of the civil war.[128] These defections undoubtedly contributed to the Saudis' decision to ground their air force at the beginning of the conflict, and to provide indirect assistance to the royalists rather than to put their own forces on the ground in Yemen. According to Hart's recollections, "the Saudis never trusted their pilots very much [after pilots defected]. They never put them in

[127] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Macomber), November 18, 1962, National Security Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 11/16/62-11/30/62, JFK Library.
[128] Memo from Roger Hilsman, State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, "Subject: UAR Capabilities for Subversion in Saudi Arabia," March 13, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 208, Folder: Yemen General, Saudi Arabian Cables, 1/63-3/63, JFK Library.

combat. Even when their cities were bombed, they never put them over in the area, kept them in another part of the country….The only people they trusted—the Saudis at that time—were the Mujahidin, the 'White Army' under Prince Abdullah ibn Abdulaziz, half brother to Faisal.[129]" Due to coup-proofing concerns, "Military units were generally deployed along the periphery, facing the kingdom's greatest threats, with only trusted units of the SANG [White Army/national guard] near the capital and oilfields."[130] Senior Saudi military officials were chosen primarily for their loyalty to the regime rather than skill or experience, and the military had difficulty finding and recruiting skilled personnel who could operate and maintain technologically advanced military hardware.[131]

However, in spite of these significant limitations in Saudi military capabilities, U.S. officials repeatedly expressed concerns that Saudi forces would cross the border into Yemen, especially in late 1963 and early 1964, suggesting that some elements of the Saudi military had the capacity to do so. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia could have used Jordanian crews and aircraft and U.S. military equipment to intervene directly in north Yemen but did not (see below), precisely because U.S. leverage restricted them from doing so.

The civil war coincided with a period of heightened Cold War tensions, including the aftermath of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, the 1958-61 Berlin Crisis, and the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis that took place within the first month of the civil war. Throughout this period, the United States and Soviet Union routinely competed for influence in the Third World, acquiring client states and providing support to potential clients in civil wars.[132]

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[129] Parker Hart, "Parker T. Hart Oral History Interview-JFK #3," interview by Dennis J. O'Brien. John F. Kennedy Library, June 10, 1970, 60.
[130] Kenneth M. Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948-1991* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 429.
[131] Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 431.
[132] For a comprehensive history, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Because of its strategic location and oil reserves, Saudi Arabia has long been considered an important ally and client of the United States. The security relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia was formalized in 1950 under the Truman administration when President Truman sent a letter to the Saudi King assuring him that "the United States is interested in the preservation of the independence and territorial integrity of Saudi Arabia."[133] Throughout the 1950's the United States initiated a series of military agreements with Saudi Arabia, including U.S. training of Saudi military forces and access to the Dhahran airfield, that formed the backbone of the U.S.-Saudi security relationship. As the Cold War heated up in the late 1940's and 1950's, Dhahran airfield became an important component of the U.S.-led security architecture in the region designed to counter Soviet influence.[134] The United States' efforts to build up Saudi Arabia to balance against Soviet influence was the centerpiece of the Eisenhower Doctrine: Saudi Arabia was seen by Eisenhower's Secretary of State John Foster Dulles as "the best counter to Nasser."[135]

While choosing not to exert a significant amount of leverage over the UAR, the Kennedy administration put significantly more pressure on U.S. client Saudi Arabia to refrain from intervening. This pressure did not prevent Saudi Arabia from intervening entirely—the Saudis provided aid to the royalists in the form of weapons, training, and the provision of financial resources nearly throughout the conflict, with significant periods during which the flow of aid stopped. The UAR's intervention in Yemen posed a direct security threat to Saudi Arabia: the UAR, Saudi Arabia's chief regional rival, had deployed a significant number of troops in Yemen and engaged in air strikes on Saudi towns near the Yemen border throughout the war. In the first few months of the war, Saudi and U.S. officials even believed that the UAR might use its

[133] Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 101.
[134] Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 45.
[135] Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 74.

military presence in Yemen to launch an invasion of Saudi Arabia across its southern border, or to provide supplies to Saudi dissidents to destabilize the regime from within. In spite of this national security threat to Saudi Arabia, U.S. pressure successfully prevented Saudi Arabia from intervening more directly in Yemen, and was even able to get Saudi Arabia to temporarily cut off aid to the royalists in 1963 and again in 1965.

Recognition (September-December 1962)

Saudi Arabia began providing support to the royalists almost immediately after the coup, and Jordan provided assistance to the royalists through Saudi Arabia.[136] From the outbreak of fighting in late September until the United States officially recognized the YAR in December 1962, U.S. officials put significant pressure on Saudi officials to stay out of the civil war. U.S. diplomats repeatedly impressed upon Prince Faisal—and the Jordanian King Hussein, who attempted to provide assistance to Saudi Arabia— much like they did the UAR, that the United States opposed any outside intervention in Yemen. However, unlike with the UAR, U.S. officials took steps to exert leverage over Saudi Arabia in order to prevent an escalation of Saudi involvement in Yemen, even going so far as to create new sources of leverage that could be exerted to affect Saudi behavior (see Operation Hard Surface, below).

Two specific elements of the U.S. message to Saudi Arabia in this period highlight the pressure in the form of threats of withdrawn military aid used to dissuade Saudi Arabia from escalating their involvement in Yemen. First, U.S. diplomats were instructed to impress upon their Saudi counterparts that the Saudi government must not share U.S.-provided military equipment to the royalists, pointing to prior agreements stipulating that such weapons only be

[136] E.g., see Memorandum for McGeorge Bundy, from State Department, October 4, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 10/1/62-10/8/62, JFK Library.

used for self-defense.[137] In response, according to U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia Parker Hart's recollections, the Saudis heeded these warnings and did not share weapons acquired from the United States.[138]

Second, on November 7, King Hussein sent a message to the U.S. embassy indicating that the Saudi government had requested that Jordan send aircraft to Saudi Arabia to deter the UAR's air strikes on Saudi towns. Whether the aircraft were to be used as a deterrent or to engage directly with the UAR was left unstated.[139] On November 10th, the Jordanians informed U.S. diplomats that they had sent six Hawker Hunter aircraft to Saudi Arabia, and that they would have six additional aircraft available on a stand-by basis.[140] In response, the State Department immediately sent instructions that "Embassy Jidda [sic] should pursue vigorously [the] objective of early return of planes to Jordan. Prior to return in no [repeat] no event should those planes operate near or across [the] Yemeni border."[141] The U.S. ambassador in Jordan was instructed that the United States did not wish to threaten King Hussein directly, "but cannot preclude doing so if his actions risk worsening conflict…You should make clear to GOJ that employment U.S. financed weapons for other than defensive purposes would prejudice future military aid."[142] On November 15, a State Department telegram to the ambassador in Jordan noted that the "Department believes time has come to consider what steps USG…might take to deter GOJ from course of folly…has entire $14 million SA Fund Embassy recently authorized

[137] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, October 9, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 10/9/62-10/15/62, JFK Library.
[138] Parker Hart, "Parker T. Hart Oral History Interview-JFK #1," interview by Dennis J. O'Brien. John F. Kennedy Library, April 15, 1969, 15.
[139] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, October 9, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 10/9/62-10/15/62, JFK Library.
[140] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Macomber), November 10, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 11/1/62-11/15/62, JFK Library.
[141] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, November 10, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 11/1/62-11/15/62, JFK Library.
[142] Ibid.

transfer to GOJ been handed over? If not, you should make no repeat no further payments until authorized."[143] In response to pressure on both the Jordanian and Saudi Arabian governments, the six Jordanian aircraft were returned to Jordan on November 21st.[144] At the same time, the U.S. ambassador in Saudi Arabia prevailed on the Saudi government to send the aircraft back to Jordan.

In addition to threats, U.S. officials also created incentives to deter Saudi escalation in Yemen. These included sending a U.S. destroyer to patrol the Red Sea costs and increasing the tempo of visits of U.S. Navy ships to Saudi ports; the visit of U.S. aircraft to Dhahran air base; and intensified consultation with the Saudi Defense Minister on a training program for Saudi pilots.[145] President Kennedy wrote a letter to King Saud describing the depth of the United States' commitment to Saudi Arabia and its sovereignty, and offered to allow the Saudis to publish the letter to publicize this commitment. Saudi officials initially declined, but after recognition went forward in spite of their reservations, the letter was published. These measures were intended to reassure Saudi Arabian officials of the U.S. commitment to the defense of Saudi Arabia, but they were also made with the implicit understanding, which became explicit with Operation Hard Surface, that such measures were contingent on Saudi compliance with U.S. officials' demands regarding Yemen.

Perhaps the most notable effect of U.S. leverage over Saudi Arabia was Saudi's acquiescence to the recognition agreement (see below), in spite of the fact that negotiations between the United States and UAR over the terms of recognition did not include Saudi officials.

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[143] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, November 15, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 11/1/62-11/15/62, JFK Library.
[144] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Macomber), November 22, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 11/16/62-11/30/62, JFK Library.
[145] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, November 24, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Saudi Arabia, Box 157, Folder: Saudi Arabia General, 7/62-9/62, JFK Library.

Ambassador Hart later recalled that when Crown Prince Faisal was furious when he was informed of the terms of recognition, which was "cooked up as a formula between Washington and Cairo and agreed to, and then I was told to sell it to King Faisal. Well, he was absolutely furious; I've never seen the man so angry in my life. Here we'd been a close friend of Saudi Arabia and he was handed a *fait accompli*."[146] According to Hart, Faisal was upset because Saudi Arabia was not consulted about the terms of recognition in spite of the United States' "long and intimate relationship with Saudi Arabia," but also because the terms of the deal were "transparently in Nasser's favor."[147] Other U.S. officials acknowledged that the UAR was getting away without having to make significant concessions as part of the disengagement agreement while Saudi Arabia was being pressured by the United States to make what amounted to deeper concessions. The U.S. ambassador to Jordan noted that the

> UAR, which is a major intervener in Yemen situation, [is being] asked only for 'phased withdrawal' [of] its forces there. At the same time Saudis (and Jordanians) [are being] asked [to] stop their intervention (which [is] on a smaller scale) at once. (2) Saudi forces [are] being asked to withdraw from particular area within sovereign territory of Saudi Arabia (vicinity Yemen border)…seems somewhat one-sided demand in view of request for only phased withdrawal [of] UAR forces from territory other than their own.[148]

Similarly, Komer acknowledged in a memo to President Kennedy about the recognition agreement that the U.S. proposal was "stacked in [Nasser's] favor."[149] But Saudi Arabia ultimately conceded to the deal in spite of this because the United States both possessed leverage over Saudi Arabia and had demonstrated that it was willing to use that leverage if necessary.

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[146] Parker Hart, "Parker T. Hart Oral History Interview-JFK #1," interview by Dennis J. O'Brien. John F. Kennedy Library, April 15, 1969, 16.
[147] Parker Hart, "Parker T. Hart Oral History Interview-JFK #3," interview by Dennis J. O'Brien. John F. Kennedy Library, June 10, 1970, 60.
[148] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Macomber), November 11, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 11/1/62-11/15/62, JFK Library.
[149] Memorandum for the President, from Robert Komer, November 14, 1962, National Security Files, Robert W. Komer Files, box 447, Folder: Yemen 1961-4/63, JFK Library.

Saudi Arabia's compliance with U.S. officials' requests that it not escalate in Yemen (and in 1963, that Saudi temporarily halt aid provision to the royalists all together, see below) is all the more surprising given that Saudi officials saw the presence of the UAR on their southern border as a direct threat.

Both Saudi and U.S. officials worried that Nasser might intend to use north Yemen as a platform to launch an invasion of Saudi Arabia, or as a means of providing direct support to pro-Nasser Saudi dissidents.[150] Nasser's ongoing propaganda attacks on the Saudi and Jordanian monarchies, and an attempt to drop supplies intended for Saudi dissidents into Saudi Arabia in February 1963, only reinforced this concern.[151] Senior Saudi and Jordanian officials repeatedly registered their concern that the United States was conceding significant ground by allowing UAR forces to remain in Yemen while putting direct pressure on Saudi Arabia and Jordan to not become further involved.[152] The King of Jordan, for example, complained to the U.S. ambassador in mid-October 1962 that the United States was "telling our friends (i.e., Jordan) not to intervene, while at the same time Nasser…was as a practical matter free to send supplies and men to [the] revolutionary regime…in effect, therefore, U.S. was favoring [the] revolutionary regime since without aid from Jordan and Saudi Arabia [the Imam] could not suppress [the] revolt."[153] A senior Saudi official even claimed to Ambassador Hart that "we are in a battle of life and death" with Nasser in Yemen.[154] While these exchanges were undoubtedly designed to draw the attention and sympathy of U.S. diplomats, the U.S. ambassador to Jordan noted that "I

[150] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 49.
[151] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Hart), March 2, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, box 208, Folder: Yemen General, Saudi Arabian Cables, 1/63-3/63, JFK Library.
[152] E.g., see State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Macomber), November 12, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 11/1/62-11/15/62, JFK Library.
[153] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, November 15, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 11/16/62-11/30/62, JFK Library.
[154] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Macomber), November 22, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 11/16/62-11/30/62, JFK Library.

believe they reflect a genuine and deepening concern re USG policy" towards the conflict in Yemen.[155]

Disengagement (January-late 1963)

In spite of their deep reservations about the agreement, Saudi aid to the royalists declined sharply during the month that immediately followed recognition. Saudi aid did not end entirely, but according to Gause, "while it is doubtful that the Saudi aid spigot was completely shut off, the amount of support for the royalists certainly declined."[156] U.S. government reports at the time confirm that there appeared to have been a sharp drop, if not a complete stop, in the flow of aid to the royalists in January 1963.[157] In doing so, the Saudis passed up an opportunity to capitalize on royalist gains during a successful offensive in December 1962.[158] Furthermore, Saudi aid declined even as the UAR resumed air strikes on Saudi towns just weeks after U.S. recognition of the YAR.

As the Kennedy administration sought to get both Saudi Arabia and the UAR to comply with disengagement, a key source of leverage that the United States held over Saudi Arabia was the promise, and later deployment of, Operation Hard Surface. U.S. officials had hinted from the early months of the civil war that the United States might be willing to deploy several U.S. aircraft to Dhahran air base as a show of support for Saudi Arabia and as a deterrent to the ongoing UAR airstrikes in Saudi territory. Over the course of 1963, the promise of this deployment gradually became more concrete, and finally in July, eight American F-100s, six

[155] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Macomber), November 12, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 11/1/62-11/15/62, JFK Library.
[156] Gause, *Saudi-Yemeni Relations,* 63.
[157] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Hart), February 2, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, box 208, Folder: Yemen General, 2/63, JFK Library; State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Wheelock), February 2, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, box 208, Folder: Yemen General, 2/63, JFK Library.
[158] Ibid.

KB-50 air-to-air refueling tankers, and more than 500 U.S. military personnel were deployed to Dhahran.[159]

Although the promise of a U.S. air force deployment was enough for Saudi Arabia to suspend most aid in early 1963, as the disengagement negotiations wore on and afterwards UN officials stalled on deploying the observer mission, Saudi Arabia secretly began sending aid to the royalists again. U.S. officials began to receive intelligence reports to this effect, and on May 28 a senior Saudi official reported to Ambassador Hart that Saudi aid had resumed and would cease again once UN observers were on the ground.[160]

During the Bunker negotiations and through the deployment of UN observers, U.S. officials continued to hold out the promise of the air force deployment. The deployment was offered quite clearly as a *quid pro quo* in exchange for Saudi Arabia to cease providing aid to the Royalists once more and to cooperate with the UN mission. In February 1963, for example, a National Security Action Memo from McGeorge Bundy stated that the United States would send a special emissary to Faisal indicating that the United States was prepared to deploy a "token air defense squadron," and that the offer "would be subject to the following conditions: (a) it will be wholly contingent on a firm Saudi undertaking to suspend aid simultaneously to the Yemeni royalists…the squadron will be withdrawn if Saudi Arabia resumes aid the royalists without U.S. concurrence."[161] According to a memo recounting a meeting between Bunker and Faisal and other senior Saudi officials in March 1963, during the disengagement negotiations, Bunker conveyed that President Kennedy was ready to deploy a U.S. air force squadron "upon His

[159] Riedel, *Kings and Presidents*, 43.
[160] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Hart), May 28, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, box 208, Folder: Yemen General, 5/63, JFK Library.
[161] National Security Action Memorandum No. 227, from McGeorge Bundy, to the Secretary of State, "Subject: Decisions Taken at President's Meeting on Yemen Crisis," February 25, 1963, National Security Files, Robert W. Komer Files, box 447, Folder: Yemen 1961-4/63, JFK Library.

Highness' agreement to suspend Saudi aid to the royalists," and that although the mission would be intended to safeguard Saudi Arabia's territorial integrity, "the continuation of Saudi support for the royalists…would not permit the President to continue taking deterrent measures to stop [UAR] raids."[162]

Indeed, in July 1963 Faisal decided to suspend aid to the royalists for 2 months at the time that Hard Surface was deployed, although he indicated that if UAR forces had not been withdrawn after 2 months the aid would resume. This condition strongly indicates that Saudi aid stopped as a direct response to the deployment of the Hard Surface mission.[163] Komer confirmed in a memo to the president in July that U.S. officials believed that the Saudis had stopped aid to the royalists, and that "their knowledge [that] our squadron will be withdrawn if they start cheating again acts as a deterrent."[164] The deployment also played a key role in convincing Saudi officials to concede to the presence of the UN mission. Hard Surface deployed while the UN observers were themselves moving into place, but Hard Surface crews were instructed not to proceed to Jeddah until they had received notification from the UN mission that they were in place.[165] Additionally, the rules of engagement that President Kennedy greed to for Hard Surface did not authorize U.S. aircraft to fire on intruder aircraft.[166] The deployment itself was therefore primarily designed to hold the Saudis to their promise of withdrawing from the demilitarized

[162] Memorandum of Conversation, Participants: Prince Faysal, Deputy Foreign Minister Sayyid 'Umar Saqqaf, Amb Parker T. Hart, President's special envoy Amb Ellsworth Bunker, Isa K Sabbagh, PAO, US Embassy, Jidda, at Crown Prince Faysal's home, March 17, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, box 208, Folder: Yemen General, 3/63, JFK Library.
[163] Telegram, Central Intelligence Agency, "Subject: Saudis Continue Sending Arms and Ammunition to Southern Saudi Arabia," July 17, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, box 208a, Folder: Yemen General, 7/63, JFK Library.
[164] Memorandum for the President, from Robert Komer, July 12, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, box 208a, Folder: Yemen General, 7/63, JFK Library.
[165] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Hart), October 25, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Saudi Arabia, box 157a, Folder: Saudi Arabia General, 9/63-11/63, JFK Library.
[166] Message: Mats Scott AFB ILL Nineteenth AF Seymour Johnson AFB, from JCS, "Deployment of Forces to Saudi Arabia: HARD SURFACE," no date, National Security Files, Country Files—Saudi Arabia, box 157, Folder: Saudi Arabia General, 4/63-5/63, JFK Library.

zone and allowing UN observers in. Although its presence had the secondary intent of deterring UAR attacks on Saudi territory, Hard Surface was not actually authorized to take any actions to deter the UAR.

Even after Hard Surface had been deployed, it continued to serve as an important source of U.S. leverage over Saudi Arabia. In August, senior Saudi officials expressed frustration to U.S. diplomats that the UAR continued to bomb Saudi territory, and indicated that they were considering resuming aid to the royalists in response. The U.S. ambassador was instructed to respond that if Saudi Arabia did resume providing aid to the royalists, the United States "would be compelled to withdraw [the] USAF squadron and curtail air defense support activity which [was] explicitly offered on [the] basis [of] Saudi-UAR acceptance [of] disengagement."[167] In October, as U.S. officials prevailed upon the Saudis to agree to an extension of the UN mandate, Ambassador Hart "repeatedly made clear" to Faisal that "I did not see how [the] air unit could remain if aid to Royalists resumed" and "bore down strongly on [the] need for" an extension of the UN mission.[168] Less than a week after that meeting, Faisal informed U.S. officials that he approved the extension of the UN mission without conditions.[169]

Saudi acquiescence to the conditions associated with disengagement was all the more remarkable given that the conditions of the UN mission were still stacked against Saudi Arabia. Not only was Saudi Arabia required to cease all aid while the UAR was only required to begin withdrawing its forces, but the terms of the UN mission meant that observers were able to directly monitor Saudi aid flows because they were stationed in the demilitarized zone on either

[167] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, August 16, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, box 208a, Folder: Yemen General, 8/63, JFK Library.
[168] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Hart), October 25, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, box 208a, Folder: Yemen General, 9/63, JFK Library.
[169] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Hart), October 31, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, box 208a, Folder: Yemen General, 10/63, JFK Library.

side of the border. UN observers did not have access to UAR troop garrisons in Sana'a or troop transportation facilities in order to monitor the UAR withdrawal.[170]

Inter-Arab Thaw (late 1963-late 1965/early 1966)

From December 1963 through late 1965/early 1966, Saudi Arabian leadership engaged in the summitry that led to the Jeddah Agreement in August 1965, as described above. Additionally, in September 1965, following the Jeddah Agreement, the Saudis "stopped financial support to the royalists, and saw to it that Hamid al-Din family members were not numbered among the royalist delegates to Haradh."[171] This marked a significant departure from the rivalry between the UAR and Saudi Arabia that had existed until this point.

The incoming Johnson Administration went further than the Kennedy Administration in injecting uncertainty into the U.S.-Saudi security relationship. This uncertainty was designed to act as a deterrent to further Saudi engagement in Yemen, and was successful in doing so. Specifically, Saudi officials remained deeply concerned from December 1953 through late 1965 over their uncertainty about the extent of the U.S. commitment to the defense of Saudi Arabian sovereignty and territorial integrity, the backbone of the U.S.-Saudi relationship. As the Johnson Administration came into office, the U.S. ambassador was instructed to convey the United States' unshaken commitment to Saudi Arabia's security, but also that the U.S. government "undertaking to stand by Faisal would be adversely affected by [the] resumption of Saudi aid to royalists…USG cannot be placed in [an] awkward position of appearing [to] provide [a]

[170] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 90.
[171] Alexei Vassiliev, *King Faisal of Saudi Arabia: Personality, Faith and Times* (Saqi, 2013), 296.

protective umbrella to indirect Saudi aggression in Yemen."[172] U.S. officials gave many subsequent warnings using similar language throughout 1964 and 1965.

Throughout 1964 and '65, Saudi officials demonstrated their concern by repeatedly pressing U.S. officials for a clear understanding of U.S. defense commitments to Saudi Arabia. U.S. officials, in turn, responded consistently that "we would come to the defense of Saudi Arabia against 'unprovoked attack."[173] In the same breath, U.S. officials also implied that aid to the royalists could constitute provocation, directly linking Saudi aid to the royalists to the United States' commitment to defend Saudi Arabia against UAR aggression. In the summer of 1965, to take just one example, U.S. officials "made clear to Faisal that our commitment to support Saudi integrity did not constitute an umbrella under which he could assist elements fighting against the Yemeni government we recognized."[174] Additionally, Hard Surface was withdrawn in January 1964, therefore removing what the Saudis regarded as an important symbol of the United States' security commitment to Saudi Arabia. This uncertainty generated leverage that the Johnson Administration was able to successfully use to keep Saudi Arabia from expanding its aid to the royalists and to encourage Faisal to engage in direct negotiations with Nasser.

Finally, the Johnson Administration introduced an additional source of leverage in the spring of 1965, when negotiations over a potential UK-U.S. military aid package to Saudi Arabia began. As the Jeddah Accord negotiations took place in August, the aid package was still under discussion and had not been concluded or publicly announced, giving the Saudis additional

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[172] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, December 23, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Saudi Arabia, box 155, Folder: Saudi Arabia Volume 1, 12/63-4/67 [1 of 4], LBJ Library.
[173] State Dept. Incoming Airgram (Eilts), "Subject: Annual U.S. Policy Assessment—Saudi Arabia," March 30, 1966, National Security Files, Country Files—Saudi Arabia, box 155, Folder: Saudi Arabia Volume 1, 12/63-4/67 [1 of 4], LBJ Library.
[174] "Background Paper: Prince Sultan Ibn Abdul Aziz, Minister of Defense of Saudi Arabia, unofficial visit, February 20-25, 1966," no date, National Security Files, Country Files—Saudi Arabia, box 155, Folder: Saudi Arabia Volume 1, 12/63-4/67 [3 of 4], LBJ Library.

incentive to come to an agreement with Nasser over Yemen, and to cease its aid to the royalists in compliance with the Jeddah Accord in August 1965. A CIA National Intelligence Estimate from May 1966 concluded that Saudi Arabia did cut off aid to the royalists during this period.[175]

Resumption of the Arab Cold War (early 1966-1967)

The conclusion of the negotiations over the Saudi military package in December 1965 meant that the United States lost this source of leverage over Saudi Arabia. In December 1965, Saudi Arabia received an Anglo-American military contract of unprecedented size, which included forty British Lightning planes, 150 American Hawk surface-to-air missiles, radar and communications equipment, and British training and support. As the defense system was being installed, King Faisal was also able to purchase additional aircraft and Thunderbird I SAMs from the British.[176] Although the arms deal was defensive in nature, "its thrust was anti-Egyptian."[177] Because the aid package was built around air defense, it also assuaged Saudi fears about the extent of the U.S. security commitment to Saudi Arabia that U.S. officials had cultivated over the course of 1964 and '65. The arms deal was also seen as a move by the British and the United States to appoint Faisal "as the heir to the British imperial position east of Suez and the guarantor of Persian Gulf security" as the British continued to withdraw from the Gulf.[178] The deal therefore strengthened Faisal's position in the region by demonstrating unequivocally the U.S. support for Saudi security, emboldening Saudi Arabia to behave more aggressively towards their regional opponents.

[175] National Intelligence Estimate, Central intelligence Agency, "The Outlook for the United Arab Republic," May 19, 1966, National Security Files, National Intelligence Estimates Files, box 6, Folder: 36.1 UAR, LBJ Library.
[176] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 112.
[177] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 257.
[178] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 257.

In response, King Faisal's actions over the early months of 1966 contributed to the end of the Arab détente. Nasser sent Faisal a proposal regarding future negotiations over Yemen in January but as of late February, Faisal had not yet responded. The long delay was seen by Nasser as a major slight, and likely contributed to the breakdown of the detente.[179] More importantly, in the same month that an agreement was reached on the military aid package, King Faisal began to engage in personal diplomacy with other conservative leaders in the region. On December 8, Faisal traveled to Iran, marking the first visit to Iran by a Saudi monarch in a decade. At the end of the visit, Faisal and the Shah declared a joint interest in forming an "Islamic conference" that would include Saudi Arabia and Iran as well as other conservative regimes in the region. The Islamic conference was intended to counter Nasser's revolutionary movement and displace Nasser from his central role in convening the summits of Arab leaders over the previous two years.[180] Over the next nine months, Faisal traveled to nine Muslim states, including Jordan, Tunisia, and Sudan, to promote the Islamic conference.[181] Faisal saw the Islamic conference as "a weapon in his diplomatic arsenal helping to strengthen his defenses against the UAR."[182] Indeed, it was perceived by Nasser "as a serious new attempt to isolate him in the Arab world."[183]

Faisal's intransigence with regards to Yemen continued through the end of the UAR intervention in Yemen. In April 1967, the U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia reported that King

[179] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Eilts), February 20, 1966, National Security Files, Country Files—Saudi Arabia Volume 1, 12/63-4/67 [1 of 4], LBJ Library.
[180] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 112.
[181] Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 93.
[182] State Dept. Incoming Airgram (Eilts), "Subject: Annual U.S. Policy Assessment—Saudi Arabia," March 30, 1966, National Security Files, Country Files—Saudi Arabia, box 155, Folder: Saudi Arabia Volume 1, 12/63-4/67, [1 of 4], LBJ Library.
[183] James, *Nasser at War*, 84.

Faisal "utterly refused to commit himself to stopping aid to Yemeni royalists."[184] U.S. officials found that "Faisal has also not been as forthcoming as appeared appropriate in working with Nasser to implement the Jidda Agreement…His unbending approach to negotiating procedural matters (such as the proportion of royalists and republicans in the interim government) and indications of some continued Saudi arms aid to the royalists give credence to accusations that he does not fully desire a Yemen settlement."[185] Thus, the conclusion of the UK-U.S. military aid package removed a crucial source of leverage for the United States, giving Saudi Arabia greater leeway to double down on its commitment to the royalists in Yemen and disengage from negotiations with the UAR.

Intervention in the north Yemen civil war ended due to a *deus ex machina*: the Six Day War in June 1967. The UAR sent troops to the Sinai Peninsula on May 14, 1967 as tensions with Israel rose. In June 1967, Israel launched pre-emptive air strikes on the UAR air force and a ground incursion into the Sinai and the Gaza Strip. The heavy casualties and loses in military hardware sustained by the UAR meant that it could no longer sustain the intervention in Yemen. The war also provided Nasser with a face-saving way to withdraw from Yemen.

The UAR's withdrawal from Yemen began soon after the Six Day War ended. At the Khartoum Conference, a summit of Arab states in August 1967, Nasser and Faisal negotiated Egypt's withdrawal from Yemen. In return for withdrawing completely from Yemen, Nasser received the promise of Saudi financial aid, a remarkable turnaround considering that the UAR had conducted air strikes on Saudi towns only months prior. Nasser agreed to withdraw all UAR troops within three months and that Yemen would hold a plebiscite after the UAR army had

[184] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Eilts), April 12, 1967, National Security Files, Country Files—Saudi Arabia, box 155, Folder: Saudi Arabia Volume 1, 12/63-4/67 [1 of 4], LBJ Library.
[185] Memorandum, "Subject: Downplaying Faisal's Visit," no date, National Security Files, Country Files—Saudi Arabia, box 155, Folder: Saudi Arabia Volume 1, 12/63-4/67 [3 of 4], LBJ Library.

departed, concessions that "amounted to surrender" on Nasser's part. The Saudis even offered to provide ships to assist with the seaborne evacuation of UAR troops and heavy weapons, and Nasser accepted the offer. The withdrawal began on September 10, and on November 29, 1967, a ceremony at Hodeidah port marked the departure of the final UAR soldier from Yemen.

Alternative Explanation 1: Sectarianism/Ideology

Ideology clearly played a role in the intervention decision, as Nasser's revolutionary ideology, and Saudi opposition to it, was central to these states' competition for regional status. The Yemeni coup's self-identification with the Free Officers movement encouraged the Saudi Arabia, as well as other conservative monarchies in the region like Jordan, to see the war lens of competition for regional status. However, I did not see any evidence that ideological ties motivated the Saudi leadership to intervene on behalf of the royalist cause: in fact, because of the Imam's support for Nasser in the late 1950's, Saudi officials did not feel particularly tied to the Yemeni imamate.

Alternative Explanation 2: Domestic Politics

The Saudi regime was in the midst of an ongoing intra-regime dispute about succession at the time of the coup in Yemen. This regime instability provides a partial explanation as to why the Saudi regime decided to provide indirect support to the Yemeni royalists.

When the founder of the Saudi monarchy, King Abdulaziz, died in 1953, he was succeeded by his son King Saud, and another son, Prince Faisal, was appointed Crown Prince. By the late 1950's, however, a power struggle between Saud and Faisal had developed. In 1958, senior members of the royal family and of the religious leadership, or *ulema*, pressured Saud into

transferring many of his day-to-day powers to Faisal, appointing Faisal to the position of prime minister and foreign minister.[186] However, Saud nominally remained king, and over time, he and his supporters took steps to circumscribe the authority of Faisal and his faction. When Saud flew to the United States to receive medical treatment in December 1961, Faisal seized *de facto* authority again. According to Faisal biographer Joseph Kechichian, Faisal used the crisis of the UAR intervention in Yemen "to assume full executive powers" and appoint his loyalists to senior roles in the Council of Ministers.[187] Saud was reduced once again to the role of figurehead, and was forced to abdicate in favor of Faisal in November 1964.[188]

This regime instability may be linked to Faisal's decision to provide indirect support to the royalists in Yemen. By intervening, he may have sought to hype up the external threat in order to induce a domestic rally-round-the-flag effect. Additionally, he may have chosen to not intervene directly and to instead keep loyal members of the Saudi military home to shore up his authority in case the crisis got worse. Without access to accounts of his contemporaries in the regime or the Saudi archives, it is difficult to say for sure. Thus, changes in domestic politics are correlated with indirect intervention in this case, but it is difficult to trace any definitive causal links.

Conclusion

The status anxiety and great power relationships-capacity explanations do the best job of explaining Saudi indirect intervention in Yemen beginning in 1962. Saudi leaders believed that Saudi Arabia's regional status had suffered in the later 1950's and early 1960's due to the gains made across the region by their regional rival, Nasser, and his revolutionary movement. Nasser's

[186] Nadav, *Saudi Arabia*, 95.
[187] Kechichian, *Faysal*, 76.
[188] See Kechician, *Faysal*; and Riedel, *Kings and Presidents*.

success was seen as provocative of domestic instability within Saudi Arabia that could threaten the regime. Supporting the royalists was a means of attempting to stave off further losses in regional status. Additionally, Saudi Arabia was held back from intervening directly both by its military weaknesses and by U.S. pressure. This stood in stark contrast to U.S. tolerance of and Soviet logistical support for Egypt's intervention in the war (see Chapter X). In this case, both ideology and domestic politics also provide a piece of the puzzle. However, ideological affinities were motivating of Saudi officials through the prism of regional competition and their perception that Saudi had lost regional status since the late 1950's in a way that threatened the regime's stability. Saudi leaders did not have any particular affinity for the Yemeni imamate outside of this framework of regional competition. Domestic politics and Faisal's attempts to consolidate his own authority within the monarchical regime may also provide a partial explanation for Saudi Arabia's indirect intervention in Yemen. However, there is little evidence either before or against this explanation due to lack of access to or reporting on Faisal's inner circle. Finally, the causal direction of the regime instability explanation is ultimately indeterminate: while in 1962 it may have impeded direct intervention in Yemen, in 2015, a similar succession crisis may have pushed Saudi towards intervening directly in Yemen. The following section takes up this case study.

Case Study 2: Yemen Civil War, 2015-2018

On March 26, 2015, Saudi Arabia and a coalition of Arab states launched *Operation Decisive Storm* to intervene directly in Yemen's civil war on behalf of President Hadi's government and allied forces. The intervention included a sustained campaign of air strikes, the blockade of air and sea routes into Yemen, and the deployment of Special Forces, led by the

UAE but with contributions from other coalition members as well.[189] While the intervening coalition is often described as Saudi-led, in reality since about April 2015 there has been a de facto division of labor between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, with Saudi Arabia taking the lead on the air campaign in the north of the country, while the UAE has led the southern campaign, primarily through the use of its Special Forces. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have contributed to efforts to train and equip local militias, although these efforts have been dominated by the UAE in the south.[190] Both have also played an important role in the naval blockade along the Yemeni coast.[191]

According to the Yemen Data Project, between March 26, 2015, and March 25, 2018, the coalition has conducted an average of 15 air raids per day (with each air raid comprising one or multiple strikes) and 453 air raids per month on average, for a total of 16,749 over the course of the first three years of the conflict. About 30% of all recorded air strikes have targeted non-military sites, with about one third targeting military sites and an additional one third targeting sites of an unknown type.[192] The intervention was renamed *Operation Restoring Hope* in April 2015, around the time that Emirati forces began taking the lead on the ground war in the south. The most readily measurable indicator of the Saudi-led coalition's behavior over time is the number of air raids per month. Additionally, because U.S. officials' concerns about the intervention revolved in large part around the humanitarian implications of the airstrikes, changes in the tempo of airstrikes are an effective measure of the efficacy of U.S. officials' efforts to exert leverage over Saudi and Emirati partners in the region. U.S. officials have also

[189] Coalition members include Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the de facto leaders of the coalition, as well as Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco, Senegal, and Sudan. Qatar was also a coalition member until 2017; see below.
[190] Salisbury, *Yemen,* 10.
[191] Eman Ragab,"Beyond Money and Diplomacy: Regional Policies of Saudi Arabia and UAE after the Arab Spring," *The International Spectator* 52, no. 2 (2017): 45.
[192] Yemen Data Project, *Monthly Update on Saudi Coalition Air Raids in Yemen,* March 2018, http://yemendataproject.org/ (accessed March 27, 2018).

raised concerns about humanitarian effects of the blockade of Yemeni ports, and I address this issue in the section below on the Trump administration.

Figure 1 depicts the number of air raids per month conducted by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen since March 2015, according to the Yemen Data Project. While the tempo of airstrikes remained relatively high throughout the first calendar year of the intervention, they declined significantly in the first half of 2016. In August and September 2016, airstrikes began to increase again in tempo, but fell off again in November. By December 2016, the temp began to rise again, and January 2017 had one of the highest rates or air raids for all recorded months. Since January 2017, the rate of air raids has declined slightly but has remained more or less steady.

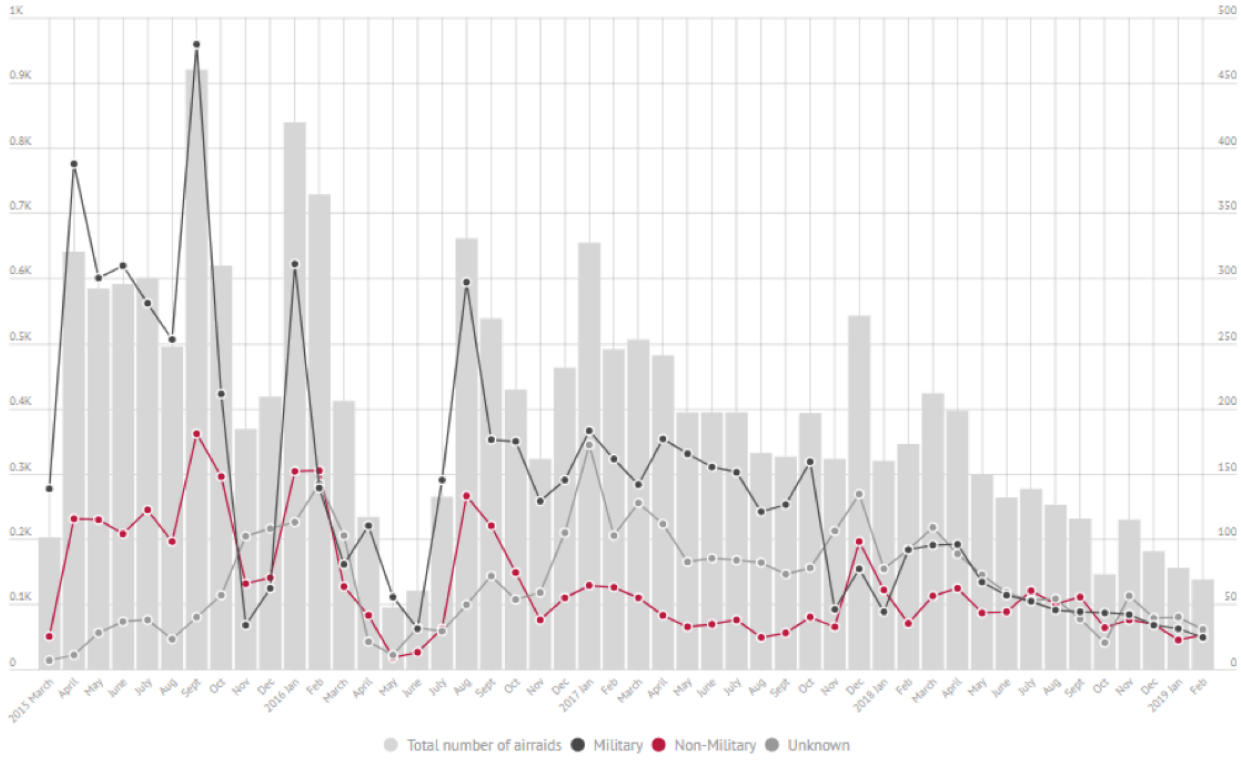

Figure 3: Number of air raids per month, March 2015-March 2018

Source: Yemen Data Project, 2019

Hypothesis 1: Status Anxiety

Policymakers in Saudi Arabia (and the UAE) saw the coalition intervention as a means of countering what they perceived as Iranian gains across the region over the course of the Arab Spring. Despite what Iranian leaders saw as a defensive posture in Syria, the Arab Gulf states perceived Iran's increasing role in the region during the Arab Spring, including its funding and training of proxy forces and the deployment of IRGC and Hezbollah forces in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere, as "a bold maneuver to seize regional hegemony."[193] Mohammed bin Salman, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia who is commonly understood as the architect of the Yemen intervention, told American reporter Jeffrey Goldberg that "I believe the Iranian supreme leader makes Hitler look good…. The supreme leader is trying to conquer the world….We are pushing back on these Iranian moves. We've done this in Africa, Asia, in Malaysia, in Sudan, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon."[194] In another interview, he clarified that Ayatollah Khamenei "wants to create his own project in the Middle East very much like Hitler who wanted to expand at the time. Many countries around the world and in Europe did not realize how dangerous Hitler was until what happened, happened. I don't want to see the same events happening in the Middle East."[195] Gulf analysts have suggested that this kind of heated rhetoric actually reflects what is likely a genuine view amongst Saudi leadership of Iranian expansionist aims in the region post-2011.[196] According to Tony Blinken, then-Deputy Secretary of State, when he traveled to Riyadh to meet

[193]Shahram Akbarzadeh and Dara Conduit, "Rouhani's First Two Years in Office: Opportunities and Risks in Contemporary Iran," in *Iran in the World: President Rouhani's Foreign Policy*, eds. Shahram Akbarzadeh and Dara Conduit (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 3.
[194] Quoted in Jeffrey Goldberg, "Saud Crown Prince: Iran's Supreme Leader 'Makes Hitler Look Good,'" *The Atlantic,* April 2, 2018.
[195] Norah O'Donnell, "Saudi Arabia's Heir to the Throne Talks to 60 Minutes," *60 Minutes,* March 19, 2018.
[196] Personal interviews, Doha, April 2018.

with Mohammed bin Salman at the beginning of the coalition intervention, MbS "told me his goal was to eradicate all Iranian influence in Yemen."[197]

Saudi Arabia, as well as its GCC partners the UAE, Kuwait, and Bahrain, had suffered other major losses in the fallout of the Arab Spring, most notably the fall of key regional ally in Egypt's President Mubarak and his replacement by a Muslim Brotherhood government led by President Morsi. Although Morsi had been replaced by the beginning of the Yemen intervention in a coup by General Sisi, a firm ally of the Gulf monarchies, the fragility of important regional allies remained at the top of the minds of Saudi and Emirati policymakers. The refusal of the United States to support Mubarak, and indeed U.S. statements that Mubarak should step down, were also a keen reminder to the Gulf Arab states, at least from their perspective, that they could not necessarily rely on the United States to bolster their key regional allies, generating a deeper sense of insecurity (see below). Although the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria in mid-2014 technically placed the Sunni Gulf states and Iran on the same side, this did not mitigate the dynamics of regional competition; rather, the regional fight against ISIS escalated sectarian tensions and, in Gulf Arab eyes, gave the IRGC an excuse to have an increasingly visible ground presence in the Levant and Iraq, which further inflamed tensions.[198]

The negotiation of the Iranian nuclear deal, or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in the months leading up to the intervention was read by Saudi and Emirati policymakers as a further loss in terms of their influence in the region vis-à-vis Iran. When details of the interim nuclear framework that the Obama administration was negotiating with Iran without GCC input first leaked in November 2013, it triggered a hostile reaction amongst Gulf Arab leadership, especially amongst the Saudis, who feared that it would embolden Iran's

[197] Quoted in Dexter Filkins, "A Saudi Prince's Quest to Remake the Middle East," *The New Yorker*, April 9, 2018.
[198] Akbarzadeh and Conduit, ""Rouhani's First Two Years in Office," 180.

activities in the region even further. Saudi Arabia worried that the lifting of international sanctions following the deal would provide the Iranian state with more resources that it could devote to supporting regional proxies. Saudi leadership believed that economic sanctions and Iran's status as an international pariah had effectively "kept Iran in its box for the past decade," but the easing of sanctions and engagement with the west that accompanied the JCPOA would facilitate Iran's efforts to "exercise an increasingly assertive foreign policy" in the region.[199] Indeed, Lebanese journalist Ghassan Cherbel dubbed the intervention "Operation Restore Balance" in recognition of the view that Gulf leadership saw the intervention as a response to the Iran nuclear agreement, and as part of a broader campaign to publicly align the United States against Iran and on the side of the Arab Gulf alliance.[200]

The Saudis also worried that the deal could signal the beginning of a détente between the United States, their key security partner, and Iran or that it could even signal that the United States was willing to quietly accept the existence of an Iranian sphere of influence in the region.[201] In a 2018 interview, MbS expressed Saudi leaderships' view of Iran as a central security threat: "I can tell you that the Iranians, they're the cause of problems in the Middle East."[202] Saudi leaders also feared that any engagement between the United States and Iran could undermine the basis of the U.S.-Saudi partnership. Saudi leaders did not explicitly endorse the JCPOA from July to September 2015, a gesture widely read as indicative of their disapproval.[203] Additionally, instead of attending the May 2015 GCC Summit at Camp David in person, King

[199] Shahram Akbarzadeh and Dara Conduit, "Future Prospects," in *Iran in the World: President Rouhani's Foreign Policy*, eds. Shahram Akbarzadeh and Dara Conduit (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 179.
[200] Mark Lynch, *The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), 238.
[201] Nader Entessar, "A Regional Great Game? A Regional Great Game? Iran–Saudi Relations in Flux,",in *The Changing Security Dynamics of the Persian Gulf*, ed. Kristian Coates Ulrichsen (London: Hurst & Company, 2017).
[202] *Time*, "Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Talks to Time About the Middle East, Saudi Arabia's Plans and President Trump," April 5, 2018.
[203] Christopher M. Blanchard, *Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2017), 24-5.

Salman sent delegates in his place, a snub towards the Obama administration in retaliation for the agreement and what Saudi leaders perceived as a lack of adequate consultation with Saudi Arabia prior to the agreement.[204]

The Saudi reaction to the JCPOA was heightened by GCC states' frustrations toward U.S. policy in the region since the beginning of the Arab Spring: according to Kristian Ulrichsen, "As Gulf states' frustrations with US policy toward the Arab Spring mounted, declaratory and policy pronouncements became shriller," reflecting the increasing strain in the U.S.-GCC relationship over the course of the Obama presidency.[205] Taken together, the Obama administration's calls for Mubarak to step down and the negotiation of the JCPOA, as well as the administration's apparent efforts to keep the United States from becoming more engaged in the region, including rhetoric around the 'pivot to Asia,' led Saudi and Emirati leaders to feel that they had been abandoned by the United States. According to Karen Young, regardless of whether the United States had actually pivoted away from the region, "The perception of U.S. disengagement from the Middle East permeate[d] Gulf states' justifications for their foreign policy choices, specifically the Saudi rationale."[206]

The Yemen intervention therefore represented the GCC states' determination that their regional interests would be best secured only if they acted as a bloc rather than relying on the United States to take the lead, as they had done in the past.[207] In response to an interviewer's question about the Yemen intervention in 2018, MbS said that "we worked together to fight

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[204] Afshin Molavi, "Iran and the Gulf States" (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2018).
[205] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Links Between Domestic and Regional Security," in *The Changing Security Dynamics of the Persian Gulf,* ed. Kristian Coates Ulrichsen (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), 39.
[206] Karen E. Young, *The Interventionist Turn in Gulf States' Foreign Policies* (Washington, D.C.: The Arab Gulf States Institute, 2016), 1.
[207] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Endgames for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen," in *Politics, Governance, and Reconstruction in Yemen*, eds. Stacey Philbrick Yadav and Marc Lynch (Washington, D.C.: POMEPS, 2018), 31.

terrorism with President Obama in the beginning of 2016 we had the same views of the Iranian regime and the danger of the Iranian regime. The only difference was in the tactics of how we should deal with that evil narrative of the Iranian regime."[208]

A drop in global oil prices in mid-2014 threatened to exacerbate domestic instability, heightening the GCC leadership's sense of domestic insecurity. In most of the Gulf states, oil and/or gas revenues account for 80-90% of total government revenue. Energy revenues therefore serve as a key mechanism of wealth distribution, with the distribution of oil rents cementing the compact between the monarchical governments and their citizens.[209] In the lead-up to 2014, the Gulf states had experienced four decades of uninterrupted demographic growth, generating a youth bulge and increasing levels of unemployment. Many of the Gulf states also acquired a significant expatriate worker population, with foreign workers making up 60% of the workforce in Saudi Arabia and about 90% in the UAE and Qatar.[210] Coming on top of these long-term economic trends, a sharp decline in global oil prices in mid-2014 led to a decline in government revenue, which in turn threatened the late rentier state model of the Arab Gulf states, in which the Gulf monarchies provided subsidies for food, energy, and other consumer goods, employment, and security in exchange for the loyalty of their citizens.[211] The decline in revenue therefore created another source of potential domestic instability just as the dynamics of regional competition also threatened the Gulf states, heightening the perception of threat from an opponent gaining regional influence.

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[208] *Time*, "Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Talks."
[209] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Introduction," in *The Changing Security Dynamics of the Persian Gulf*, ed. Kristian Coates Ulrichsen (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), 5.
[210] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "The Challenge of Transition: Gulf Security in the Twenty-First Century," in *The Transformation of the Gulf: Politics, Economics and the Global Order,* eds. David Held and Kristian Coates Ulrichsen (New York: Routledge, 2012), 281-2.
[211] Matthew Gray, *A Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf*, *Center for International and Regional Studies*, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, 2011.

Saudi Arabia also risked further losses in the Yemeni civil war. Saudi leadership resented the instability on its border that the Houthis generated, going so far as to intervene briefly in the conflict between the Houthis and President Saleh's government, known as the Saada Wars. Saudi forces engaged Houthi fighters along the border and launched airstrikes against Houthi positions in November 2009.[212] In an interview, MbS declared that "The Iranian ideology penetrated some part of Yemen During that time, this militia was conducting military maneuvers right next to our borders and positioning missiles at our borders…I can't imagine that the United States will accept one day to have a militia in Mexcio launching missiles on Washington D.C., New York and LA while Americans are watching these missiles and doing nothing."[213] Saudi officials see the Arabian peninsula as Saudi's "backyard and its natural sphere of influence," so that any intrusion by a regional opponent is viewed as a critical threat to Saudi Arabia's regional influence.[214] As a commentator wrote in Saudi-owned daily *Asharq al-Awsat* as Operation Decisive Storm began, "this time, Saudi has declared an end to passive neutrality and the end of silence on Iran, and that the time has come to strengthen the central government and a new state of Yemen."[215]

On top of this threat, border security on its southern border became increasingly important to Saudi Arabia in the early 2000s with the rise of Al Qaeda in the region. The border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia extends more than 1,200 kilometers and has been disputed on and off for almost a century. Areas along the border formally became part of Saudi Arabia in the 1934 Treaty of Taif, but the dispute was not permanently settled until the 2000 Treaty of

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[212] Barak A. Salmoni, Bryce Loidolt, and Madeleine Wells, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: the Huthi Phenomenon* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2010), 2.
[213] O'Donnell, "Saudi Arabia's Heir to the Throne Talks to 60 Minutes."
[214] F. Gregory Gause III, "Saudi Arabia's Regional Security Strategy," in *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf,* ed. Mehran Kamrava (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 173.
[215] Abdulrahman al-Rashed, "Al-Tadkheel fi al-Yemen minah al-kartha/The Intervention in Yemen Prevented a Disaster," *Asharq al-Awsat*, March 27, 2015, translation by the author.

Jeddah.[216] By 2000, Saudi Arabia "perceived the frequent crossings of the borderland residents and their side effects, such as an increase in smuggling and human trafficking, as a threat to its domestic security and stability."[217] Tribes that straddle the border have long played a critical role in Saudi Arabia's efforts to maintain security along the border, and Saudi officials have traditionally focused on financial co-optation as their primary strategy of securing the border. The increasing power of the Houthis along the border region over the course of the Saada wars in the mid- to late-2000s meant that sheikhs and tribal leaders who had been co-opted by the Saudis were largely pushed out of positions of power. This loss of influence in the border region posed a threat to Saudi Arabia's border security strategy just at a time when a significant internal campaign to drive members of Al Qaeda out of Saudi Arabia led to many fleeing across the border into Yemen. The internal campaign combined with border instability created a risk that members of Al Qaeda would be able to cross the border and threaten Saudi Arabia's domestic security (see below).[218]

Saudi Arabia perceived the Houthis as an Iranian proxy and blamed Iran for the 2014 coup.[219] In response to an interview question about the Yemen intervention, MbS declared that "We don't need that on our border. But of course we don't need to have a new Hezbollah in the Arabian peninsula. This is a red line not only for Saudi Arabia but for the whole world. No one wants to have Hezbollah in a strait through which about 15 percent of the world trade goes

[216] Askar Halwan Al-Enazy, "'The International Boundary Treaty' (Treaty of Jeddah) Concluded Between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni Republic on June 12, 2000," *American Journal of International Law* 96, no. 1 (2002): 161.
[217] Marieke Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthi Conflict* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), 75-76.
[218] Marieke Brandt, "The Hidden Realities Behind Saudi Arabia's Operation Decisive Storm in Yemen," *Focal Blog*, May 15, 2015, http://www.focaalblog.com/2015/05/15/marieke-brandt-the-hidden-realities-behind-saudi-arabias-operation-decisive-storm-in-yemen/ (accessed March 1, 2018).
[219] Akbarzadeh and Conduit, "Future Prospects," 10.

through."[220] In September 2014, shortly after Houthi forces took over Sana'a, Iranian member of Parliament Ali Reza Zakani said that Sana'a was the fourth Arab capital to fall under Iranian influence, in addition to "the three Arab capitals who are already a subsidiary of the Iranian Islamic revolution," a reference to Beirut, Baghdad, and Damascus.[221] Saudi and Emirati officials saw statements likes these as an expression of Iran's intention to turn the Houthis into a proxy for expanding their influence on the peninsula, in Saudi Arabia's backyard. Thus, in addition to the threat posed by the rise of an Iranian-supported group on its southern border, the Saudis also had a history of enmity with the Houthis and worried that their rise would continue to destabilize the border. From the Saudi perspective, Iran's support for Assad in Syria, as well as the increasingly sectarian-inflected politics of Iraq, "puts Iran in a stronger position regionally than before the war….In this context, anchoring Yemen firmly within the Sunni Gulf regime's sphere of influence has taken on a greater urgency—perhaps more than it did at the beginning" of the intervention. For both of these reasons, a Houthi victory would generate further losses in regional influence for Saudi Arabia. Writing in Saudi-funded, London-based daily Al-Hayat in March 2015, a commentator declared that "Operation Decisive Storm will raise morale among the supporters of legitimacy in Yemen and many Gulf people who suffered one humiliation after the other as a result of the Houthi adventures in Yemen and at the hands of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen."[222]

[220] Stephanie Flanders, Vivian Nereim, Donna Abu-Nasr, Nayla Razzouk, Alaa Shahine and Riad Hamade, "Saudi Crown Prince Discusses Trump, Aramco, Arrests: Transcript," *Bloomberg*, October 5, 2018.
[221] Helen Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Autocracy, Neo-liberalism and the Disintegration of the State* (London: Saqi Books, 2017), 82.
[222] Raghida Dergham, "'Decisive Storm' Responds to Iran's Encroachment on Saudi Borders," *Al-Arabiya,* March 30, 2015.

Hypothesis 2: Great Power Relationships

U.S. Logistical Military Support: The Obama Administration

By the time that the Yemen intervention began, Saudi officials believed that the relationship between the United States and these two important regional partners had frayed. The Obama administration's response to the Arab Spring protest, especially the President's call for President Hosni Mubarak, an important Saudi and Emirati ally, to step down, and the administration's willingness to negotiate and sign the Iran nuclear agreement, or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), eroded the relationship from the perspective of Saudi and Emirati leaders, who believed that both moves had significant negative repercussions for their own regional strategies. The final negotiations for the JCPOA took place in March 2015 and officially concluded on April 2nd just after the Yemen intervention began.[223]

The JCPOA was seen by both sides as bringing the relationship to a potential breaking point. Saudi King Salman signaled his clear displeasure by cancelling his attendance at a U.S.-GCC summit to be held in May 2015 at Camp David, sending a lower-level representative instead.[224] The move "was widely interpreted as a snub," a rare public breach in the relationship.[225] As a result, several U.S. officials have confirmed that when Saudi officials approached them to convey that they were going to intervene in Yemen and to ask for U.S. support, U.S. officials agreed to provide logistical support to the intervention. They believed that a failure to support the intervention would be a breach too far in the relationship; providing support for the intervention may also have been a kind of quid pro quo arrangement in exchange

[223] Personal interviews, Washington, D.C., November 2017-May 2018.
[224] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Fire and Fury in the Gulf," Gulf States Analytics, January 31, 2018, https://gulfstateanalytics.com/fire-fury-gulf/ (accessed January 31, 2018).
[225] Afshin Molavi, "Iran and the Gulf States."

for Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states not publicly opposing the JCPOA.[226] According to Senator Chris Murphy, "The Obama administration was legitimately worried that a major fissure between the United States and Saudi Arabia could weaken the Iran deal;" support for the Yemen intervention as well as increased arms sales during this period was "a way to placate the Saudis."[227]

As a result, from the beginning of the intervention, the United States has provided significant military logistical assistance to the coalition, including aerial refueling for aircraft engaged in airstrikes, as well as targeting assistance and other forms of intelligence-sharing. Since mid-2016, U.S. Special Forces from Joint Special Operations Command have worked with Emirati Special Forces in southern Yemen in what they say is an advisory capacity to counter-terrorism operations and intelligence gathering against AQAP. About a dozen U.S. Green berets have reportedly also been stationed on the Saudi-Yemeni border since late 2017 to locate and destroy Houthi ballistic missiles and launch sites.[228] The volume of U.S. drone strikes and airstrikes as part of the counter-terrorism mission also increased in coordination with Emirati and partner forces. Notably, U.S. officials conceptually view the counter-terrorism mission in southern Yemen as separate from the coalition's intervention on behalf of President Hadi's government, but in practice this means working with forces that are also opposed to the Houthis.[229] U.S. forces also conducted missile strikes on radar facilities in Houthi-controlled

[226] Personal interviews, Washington, D.C., November 2017-May 2018.
[227] Quoted in Nicholas Niarchos, "How the U.S. is Making the War in Yemen Worse, The New Yorker, January 22, 2018.
[228] Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, and Eric Schmitt, "Army Special Forces Secretly Help Saudis Combat Threat from Yemen Rebels," *New York Times*, May 3, 2018.
[229] Salisbury, *Yemen*, 43.

territory in October 2016 in response to anti-ship cruise missiles launched at U.S. Navy warships in the Red Sea.[230]

In addition to direct logistical support for operations in Yemen, the United States also continued to support Saudi Arabia with large arms sales packages. Such weapons transfers increased Saudi military capacity, but also demonstrated implicit support for Saudi strategy in Yemen. Between October 2010 and October 2014, the White House approved more than $90 billion in weapons deals with Saudi Arabia. In November 2015, the State Department approved an additional sale to Saudi Arabia of $1.29 billion in air force-related weapons and equipment, including air-to-ground munitions such as laser-guided bombs that could theoretically be used in airstrikes in Yemen.[231] All told, according to Nicholas Niarchos writing in *The New Yorker*, "By the end of Obama's Presidency, the U.S. had offered more than a hundred and fifteen billion dollars' worth of arms to Saudi Arabia, the largest amount under any President, including warships, air-defense systems, and tanks."[232]

In spite of this support, however, there was concern within the administration almost from the beginning about U.S. involvement with the coalition, especially with regards to the humanitarian effects of the airstrikes. By late 2015, although Houthi forces were implicated in the deaths of hundreds of civilians, the UN estimated that the majority of civilian deaths—about 60%—were due to the coalition's bombing campaign.[233] Coalition air strikes engaged in indiscriminate targeting that led to regular strikes against civilian targets as well as military targets. Andrew Exum, who was appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle

[230] The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Letter from the President – War Powers Resolution: Text of a Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate," October 14, 2016.
[231] Sharif Abdel Kouddous, "With US Help, Saudi Arabia is Obliterating Yemen," *Public Radio International Global Post*, November 30, 2015.
[232] Niarchos, "How the U.S. is Making the War in Yemen Worse."
[233] Kouddous, "With US Help, Saudi Arabia is Obliterating Yemen."

East Policy in May 2015, reported that "When I arrived, I sensed a lot of frustration [about U.S. support for the coalition]…The Administration was unsure about whether it wanted to be involved in the war. Are we supposed to help the Saudis win or not? I don't think we ever made up our minds there."[234]

The humanitarian effects of the intervention were morally troubling to U.S. officials but also suggested that the United States could be implicated in war crimes. At first, the administration sought to change the behavior of the intervening coalition by providing assistance to improve Saudi targeting. The administration provided a 'no-strike' list of civilian locations such as hospitals and schools, and continued to expand the list to include more than 33,000 targets. According to then-Director of USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance Jeremy Konyndyk, "We broadened and broadened and broadened that [no strike] list over time as the Saudis kept striking things that we would have thought they wouldn't strike."[235] The State Department also sent Larry Lewis, an expert on reducing civilian casualties, to Saudi Arabia several times for consultation on targeting.[236]

About 45 U.S. personnel sat in a Joint Combined Planning Cell in Riyadh, presumably providing advice on targeting, although Pentagon spokespeople have subsequently sought to distance U.S. personnel from targeting choices, stating for example that "at no point did U.S. military personnel provide direct or implicit approval of target selection or prosecution."[237] However, in April 2015 a U.S. official speaking on background said that U.S. personnel "are helping [the Saudis] get a better sense of the battlefield and the state of play with the Houthi forces. We are also helping identify 'no strike' areas they would avoid." U.S. officials also

[234] Niarchos, "How the U.S. is Making the War in Yemen Worse."
[235] Quoted in Niarchos, "How the U.S. is Making the War in Yemen Worse."
[236] Niarchos, "How the U.S. is Making the War in Yemen Worse."
[237] Phil Stewart, "Exclusive: U.S. Withdraws Staff from Saudi Arabia Dedicated to Yemen Planning," *Reuters*, August 19, 2016.

reported that although previous intelligence support had been limited to reviewing Saudi targeting information to affirm its accuracy, it gradually expanded in scope to more detailed "vetting."[238] Increased support did not lead to improvements in Saudi targeting accuracy, however. According to Larry Lewis, while Saudi officials claimed to want to avoid civilian targets, in the higher ranks of the Saudi military leadership "there was less pressure for change."[239]

The situation came to a head on October 9, 2016, when a coalition 'double-tap' airstrike hit the large funeral of a prominent family's patriarch killing at least 140 civilians and wounding an additional 600.[240] The funeral strike was a watershed for the Obama administration in terms of their approach to supporting the coalition: while until October 2016 they had tried to reduce the humanitarian effects of the intervention by providing additional support, after the strike, the administration publicly rebuked the coalition and began to exert leverage over the coalition through symbolic forms of pressure that lasted until the end of the Obama administration. According to Robert Malley, then-special assistant to the President, for the administration the funeral strike "so clearly symbolized much of what was wrong" with U.S. support for the coalition.[241] Opposition to supporting the coalition also grew in congress following the strike.

An administration spokesperson released an unusually critical public statement almost immediately after the funeral strike, saying

> U.S. security cooperation with Saudi Arabia is not a blank check. Even as we assist Saudi Arabia regarding the defense of their territorial integrity, we have and will continue to express our serious concerns about the conflict in Yemen and how it has been waged. In light of this and other recent incidents, we have initiated an immediate review of our already significantly reduced support to the Saudi-led Coalition and are prepared to adjust

[238] Quoted in Mark Hosenball, Phil Stewart, and Warren Strobel, "Exclusive: U.S. Expands Intelligence Sharing with Saudis in Yemen Operation," *Reuters*, April 10, 2015.
[239] Quoted in Niarchos, "How the U.S. is Making the War in Yemen Worse."
[240] *The Guardian*, "Saudi-led Coalition Admits to Bombing Yemen Funeral," October 15, 2016.
[241] Quoted in Niarchos, "How the U.S. is Making the War in Yemen Worse."

> our support so as to better align with U.S. principles, values and interests, including achieving an immediate and durable end to Yemen's tragic conflict.[242]

The policy review led the administration to reduce intelligence-sharing regarding Houthi forces (but not AQAP targets).[243] The administration drastically reduced the number of U.S. personnel working in the Joint Combined Planning Cell, and placed a temporary freeze on a planned sale of CBU-15 cluster bombs and Raytheon precision munitions kits, a deal worth about $350 million.[244] Speaking on condition of anonymity, an administration official said that the decision to freeze certain weapons sales was "obviously a direct reflection of the concerns that we have about Saudi strikes that have resulted in civilian casualties….It's not a matter of how smart or dumb the bombs are, it's that they they're not picking the right targets. The case in point...is the one on the funeral."[245] However, even as the sale of some munitions was suspended, others went forward, including a $3.5 billion deal for 48 Chinook helicopters.[246] Jake Sullivan, a senior Obama administration advisor, later testified that the administration's logic behind providing assistance to the Saudi-led coalition "was at least in part that it would give the United States influence in pushing the coalition to (a) abide by international humanitarian law and (b) conduct its military action in a way to maximize the possibility of a diplomatic solution and minimize non-combatant casualties."[247] However, the measures placing a temporary hold on certain deals

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[242] The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by NSC Spokesperson Ned Price on Yemen," October 8, 2016.
[243] Missy Ryan, "With Small Changes, U.S. Maintains Military Aid to Saudi Arabia Despite Rebukes Over Yemen Carnage," *The Washington Post*, December 13, 2016.
[244] Helene Cooper, "U.S. Blocks Arms Sale to Saudi Arabia Amid Concerns Over Yemen War," *The New York Times,* December 13, 2016.
[245] Phil Stewart and Warren Strobel, "U.S. to Halt Some Arms Sales to Saudi, Citing Civilian Deaths in Yemen Campaign," *Reuters*, December 13, 2016.
[246] Ryan, "With Small Changes, U.S. Maintains Military Aid to Saudi Arabia Despite Rebukes Over Yemen Carnage."
[247] Jake Sullivan, Written Testimony, United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs Hearing: "U.S. Policy in the Arabian Peninsula," February 6, 2019.

were largely symbolic, and seen by humanitarian advocacy groups and others as "very limited disciplinary measures."[248]

This leverage exerted through symbolic gestures did succeed in temporarily reducing the tempo of airstrikes and may have limited some of the most egregious targeting of civilians, since a strike at the scale of the funeral airstrikes did not occur subsequently. However, because the measures were largely symbolic, and because the Obama administration was on its way out by the end of 2016, they did not have substantial long-term effects on the coalition's behavior beyond that. According to William Hartung, the public rebuke, withdrawal of U.S. personnel, and freeze on some weapons sales was "a signal but too weak of a signal. As long as they're refueling aircraft which is central to the bombing campaign, it's hard to see that they're using all the leverage they have.[249]

The coalition intervention was therefore substantially enabled by the military logistical provided by the United States (as well as to some extent the United Kingdom and France). According to several experts, the Saudi Air Force would be unable to conduct airstrikes in Yemen, at least not at the current operational tempo, without aerial refueling support provided by the United States. According to Bruce Riedel, the United States "is a partner in this war…If the United States of America and the United Kingdom tonight told King Salman that this war has to end, it would end tomorrow, because the Royal Saudi Air Force cannot operate without American and British support."[250] Once the Obama administration decided to exert some leverage over the coalition in late 2016, direct pressure (as opposed to positive assistance

[248] The Yemen Peace Project, "America's Role in Yemen 2017 and Beyond" (Washington, D.C.: Yemen Peace Project, 2017), 9.
[249] Stewart and Strobel, "U.S. to Halt Some Arms Sales to Saudi, Citing Civilian Deaths in Yemen Campaign."
[250] Fred Dews, "WATCH: Se. Chris Murphy on Revisiting U.S.-Saudi Relationship," The Brookings Institution, April 22, 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2016/04/22/watch-sen-chris-murphy-on-revisiting-u-s-saudi-relationship/, accessed March 20 2018.

measures) led to a decline in airstrikes, but few other significant measureable changes. Obama administration officials themselves believed that the pressure led to changes on the margin but not a fundamental shift in the conduct of the intervention: according to a former senior Defense Department official, the administration became "very frustrated" with the coalition but still believed that the U.S. involvement had an overall positive effect—"It's always hard to prove a negative, but I think we had some success in improving Saudi efforts to minimize civilian casualties on the margins."[251] This is likely because the pressure was largely symbolic and took the form of a rhetorical rebuke, and did not fundamentally threaten, let alone remove, assistance that was vital to sustaining the intervention.

U.S. Logistical Military Support: The Trump Administration

The beginning of the Trump administration in January 2017 represented a reset in U.S. relations with Arab Gulf states. Both the Trump administration and Saudi leaders saw the new administration as a chance to strengthen the United States' relationship with Saudi Arabia and its GCC partners after the relationship had frayed over the course of the Obama administration. The Trump administration was also much less concerned than the Obama administration had been by the end of its tenure about pressuring the Saudi-led coalition to demonstrate more concern for the humanitarian effects of the intervention and to pursue negotiations. The Trump administration's public statements about the blockade on Hodeidah Port in December 2017 are a telling exception in which the Trump administration asserted U.S. leverage to change the coalition's behavior in Yemen.

[251] Dan De Luce, Paul Mcleary, and Colum Lynch, "How the U.S. Got Dragged Into Yemen," *Foreign Policy*, December 11, 2017.

The Trump administration appeared to have closer personal relationships with key Saudi and Emirati leaders. Senior White House advisor Jared Kushner, who had been tasked with much of the administration's Middle East policy portfolio, reportedly reached out to key leaders like Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and UAE Ambassador to the U.S. Yousef Al Otaiba in the earliest weeks of the administration. On a trip to Riyadh in October 2017, Kushner reportedly grew close with the Saudi Crown Prince, staying up until 4 a.m. "swapping stories and planning strategy."[252] Ambassador Otaiba began to meet with Kushner on a regular basis: *Politico* reported that Kushner and Otaiba were "in almost constant phone and email contact."[253]

These relationships were bolstered by Saudi leaders' apparent eagerness to invest in the United States and buy large U.S. arms packages, which the Trump administration welcomed as part of its jobs-creation agenda. On his first trip abroad President Trump traveled to Riyadh in May 2017, where he signed a joint "strategic vision" that included $110 billion in weapons sales.[254] Timothy A. Lenderking, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Arabian Gulf Affairs, said that the administration "feel[s] we have truly reset the relationship as a result of this visit."[255] The Saudi Crown Prince returned the visit in March 2018, making stops at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and meeting with tech leaders in Seattle, looking for foreign investment to bolster his Vision 2030 economic reforms aimed at diversifying the Saudi economy and to generate support for the upcoming IPO of Aramco.[256] Additionally, both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have invested several million dollars in lobbying efforts in Washington,

[252] Ulrichsen, "Fire and Fury in the Gulf."
[253] Ibid.
[254] Philip Rucker and Karen DeYoung, "Trump Signs 'Tremendous' Deals with Saudi Arabia on His First Day Overseas," *The Washington Post*, May 20, 2017.
[255] Quoted in Eric Schmitt, "Saudi Arabia Tries to Ease Concerns over Civilian Deaths in Yemen," *The New York Times*, June 14, 2017.
[256] Tom DiChristopher, "Saudi Arabia's powerful 32-year-old crown prince has arrived in America. Here's his agenda." *CNBC*, March 19, 2018.

D.C. to bolster their image in the United States.[257] Finally, the Trump administration views the war in Yemen through the lens of regional competition with Iran, to a greater extent than the Obama administration did. They view Yemen as another arena in which the United States and its regional allies can push back against Iran's regional influence. The administration has used Iran's support for the Houthis as an opportunity to publicly shame Iran on the international stage in fora like the UN Security Council (see below).

These close relationships and the Trump administration's eagerness to confront Iran have led the Trump administration to uncritically back the coalition intervention in Yemen.[258] According to Bruce Riedel, "it's more important to [the Trump administration] to have good relations with the Saudis, and the Yemenis got sacrificed on this."[259] Within the first months of the administration, Defense Secretary Mattis asked the White House to lift the Obama administration's restrictions on U.S. military support for the coalition in Yemen.[260] In return, Saudi Arabia made promises to ease U.S. concerns about civilian casualties, according to a private letter from Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir to Secretary Tillerson prior to Trump's visit to Riyadh. The assurances included a promise to engage in a multi-year, $750 million training program provided by the U.S. military, an expanded no-strike list, and to observe stricter rules of engagement. These assurances were seen as conditions for the arms sales officially agreed to during the visit, and supporters of the sales in Congress and elsewhere cited the assurances as important conditions.[261]

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[257] Vivian Nereim and Bill Allison, "Saudi Arabia Reboots Its Washington Lobbying Blitz," *Bloomsberg Businessweek*, April 26, 2018.
[258] Daniel Byman, "Confronting Iran," *Survival* 60, no. 1 (2018): 121.
[259] Quoted in De Luce, Mcleary, and Lynch, "How the U.S. Got Dragged Into Yemen."
[260] Karen DeYoung and Missy Ryan, "Trump Administration Weighs Deeper Involvement in Yemen War," *The Washington Post,* March 26, 2017.
[261] Schmitt, "Saudi Arabia Tries to Ease Concerns over Civilian Deaths in Yemen."

However, these assurances did not lead to any change in the conduct of the airstrikes or the intervention more broadly. According to Oxfam's Scott Paul, "The steps that Saudi Arabia [reportedly agreed] to take are irrelevant."[262] They also closely tracked the assurances that the coalition had made to the Obama administration earlier in the war that had little effect without any attempt by the United States to exert any leverage over the coalition to comply. Indeed, analysts argued that the May 2017 trip and arms agreement "undercut any leverage the administration could have had on limiting the war in Yemen."[263] In June 2017, the Trump administration notified Congress that it would resume sales of precision-guided munitions to Saudi Arabia that had been halted by the Obama administration.[264]

The Trump administration has also continued to provide the same logistical military support to the coalition, including aerial refueling and targeting, although DoD spokespeople have given conflicting assessments of the precise support that the United States provides. According to an anonymous military official, "There are still Americans on the ground providing direct support and logistical help to allied troops.... We don't share intelligence, but we will advise and accompany them on some of these missions."[265] Additionally, U.S. drone and manned airstrikes against AQAP in Yemen more than doubled in 2017, up to 90 from 38 in the previous year.[266]

This license from the U.S. administration, in turn, has led the Saudi-led coalition to double down on fighting in Yemen. According to an anonymous Western diplomat, "There was a definite [Saudi] shift after the [U.S.] election from an approach of 'we need a deal' to thinking

[262] Quoted in Ibid.
[263] De Luce, Mcleary, and Lynch, "How the U.S. Got Dragged Into Yemen."
[264] Quoted in Ibid.
[265] Ibid; The *Atlantic* reported in December 2018 that although the Defense Department had claimed that the UAE and Saudi Arabia reimbursed the United States for the cost of aerial refueling, they had not actually been "charged adequately," Samuel Oakford and Ryan Goodman, "The U.S. is Paying More Than It Bargained for in the Yemen War," *Atlantic,* December 8, 2018.
[266] Ibid.

there might be a military solution after all, and that the Americans might help."[267] Indeed, an anonymous Trump administration official noted that ending the Obama-era limits to U.S. support for the coalition would be seen by the Saudis and Emiratis as "a green light for direct involvement in a major war."[268] This also helps explain why the number of monthly coalition air raids increased in December 2016 and January 2017, and has remained high ever since. An anonymous senior official noted that Trump administration officials had expended little political capital to pressure the coalition: "The Saudis sitting in Riyadh are mostly getting advice from the DoD on targeting. That will always undercut the humanitarian argument anyone is making."[269]

A key exception to the administration's uncritical support for the coalition intervention occurred in December 2017, when the Trump administration publicly called for the coalition to lift the blockade on Hodeidah Port. The port, located on Yemen's northwestern coast under Houthi control, is the entry point for 80% of Yemen's imported food and other critical humanitarian supplies. In August 2015, Saudi aircraft destroyed five cranes that were used to unload shipments coming into the port. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) donated $3.9 million to purchase new cranes for the port, but when they arrived coalition ships turned them away.[270]

In November 2017, the coalition imposed a complete blockade on ports and airports in Yemen in response to a ballistic missile that was fired towards Riyadh. International NGOs and humanitarian organizations issued dire warnings about the effects of the blockade, with the

[267] Quoted in Salisbury, *Yemen*, 37.
[268] Quoted in DeYoung and Ryan, "Trump Administration Weighs Deeper Involvement in Yemen War."
[269] De Luce, Mcleary, and Lynch, "How the U.S. Got Dragged Into Yemen."
[270] Alex Emmons, "The U.S. Ambassador to Yemen's Hard-Line Approach is Jamming Up Peace Efforts," *The Intercept,* December 13, 2017.

World Food Programme noting that "Hodeidah Port is a humanitarian lifeline for millions who are on the brink of famine."[271]

On December 6, 2017, the Trump administration issued a statement that very unusually publicly rebuked the coalition, calling on them to "completely allow food, fuel, water, and medicine to reach the Yemeni people who desperately need it. This must be done for humanitarian reasons immediately."[272] U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley also engaged in efforts to raise pressure on the coalition to lift the blockade and allow the cranes into the port. On December 20th, the coalition announced that it would temporarily end the blockade of Hodeidah Port and allowed for the delivery of the four new cranes. Saudi Arabia also announced after the end of the blockade that it would deposit $2 billion in the central bank in Aden to shore up Yemen's currency and pledged an additional $1.5 billion towards the UN humanitarian response plan.[273] The public nature of the pressure to open the port was seen by observers as key to getting the coalition to comply. Then-National Security Advisor Lt. General H.R. McMaster later suggested that Kushner had called Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman for the explicit purpose of addressing the blockade of the port. McMaster reportedly believed that Kushner's intercession affected the Saudi decision to loosen restrictions on Hodeidah.[274]

In the one instance where the Trump administration did use some of its leverage to place pressure on the coalition, the effort successfully changed the behavior of the interveners.

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[271] World Food Programme, "Four USAID-Funded Mobile Cranes Arrive at Yemen's Largest Red Sea Port," January 15, 2018.
[272] Quoted in Jeremy M. Sharp, *Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention*, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Services, 2018), 3.
[273] Sharp, *Yemen*, 4.
[274] David D. Kirkpatrick, Ben Hubbard, Mark Landler, and Mark Mazzetti, "The Wooing of Jared Kushner: How the Saudis Got a Friend in the White House," *The New York Times,* December 8, 2018.

U.S. Diplomatic Support

In addition to logistical military support, both the Obama and Trump administrations also provided the coalition with diplomatic cover at the UN Security Council. As a Congressional Research Service report notes, "From the start of the hostilities, Saudi Arabia was able to secure the support of the United Nations Security Council, a key development in providing the Saudi-led coalition with international approval for its intervention."[275] One month after the intervention began, the UNSC passed resolution 2216, which remains the key framework for international negotiations on the civil war in Yemen. Resolution 2216 imposed an arms embargo on the Houthis and associated forces, called on the Houthis to unilaterally disarm, and legitimized the coalition intervention after the fact under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.[276] As April Longley Alley notes, UNSCR 2216 "essentially calls for the Houthi-Saleh surrender to the Hadi government."[277] It is difficult to imagine the conditions under which the Houthis, who controlled more than half of the population and territory of Yemen, would have unilaterally surrendered. Yet despite the clear commitment problem that UNSCR 2216 presented, U.S. officials insisted that it be used as the basis for international negotiations for a political settlement in Yemen.

In 2015 most senior U.S. diplomats, including Secretary of State John Kerry, were preoccupied with the conflict in Syria amongst other global crises, and the U.S. Ambassador to Yemen Matthew Tueller, according to reporting by Alex Emmons, "was largely left to his own devices" in 2015 to shape negotiations.[278] According to current and former State Department

[275] Sharp, *Yemen*, 7.
[276] Afrah Nasser, "The Unfolding UN Failure in the Yemen War," The Atlantic Council, *MENASource,* September 21, 2017.
[277] April Longley Alley, "Collapse of the Houthi-Saleh Alliance and the Future of Yemen's War," in *Politics, Governance, and Reconstruction in Yemen*, eds. Stacey Philbrick Yadav and Marc Lynch (Washington, D.C.: POMEPS, 2018), 13.
[278] Emmons, "The U.S. Ambassador to Yemen's Hard-Line Approach is Jamming Up Peace Efforts."

officials, Ambassador Tueller used the terms of UNSCR 2216 as a framework for negotiations and opposed the Houthis having any role in Yemen's future government.

Secretary Kerry began to take a more active role in peace negotiations in the spring of 2016, with Oman, a GCC state that did not participate in the coalition intervention, acting as a facilitator amongst the parties. Secretary Kerry announced in late August 2016 that the Quad—the United States, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—had reached agreement on a framework for negotiations. Still, the negotiations aimed to facilitate the disarmament and withdrawal of Houthi forces from Sana'a, and the formation of a unity government, in line with the UNSCR 2216 framework that was favorable to the intervening coalition.[279] The negotiations led to a ceasefire agreement between the Houthis and President Hadi's government in October 2016, and in November 2016, the Houthis along with Saudi Arabia and the UAE agreed to the framework for an agreement. The negotiations were eventually scuttled when Hadi's government refused to endorse this agreement.[280] According to observers, there has been no movement on the negotiating track since the Trump administration came into office.[281] The number of monthly coalition air raids dropped precipitously during the negotiation period, likely because of U.S. pressure on the coalition to participate in negotiations in a productive way.

Thus, U.S. diplomats under the Obama administration provided the intervening coalition with diplomatic support, by framing negotiations in a way that favored the intervening coalition and insisting that both sides adhere to this framework in spite of the positions of forces on the ground. Subsequently, the Trump administration does not appear to have favored or led

[279] Jean-Marie Guéhenno, "The United States Must Pull Yemen Back from Total Collapse," *The Washington Post*, October 5, 2016.
[280] Yeganeh Torbati, "Kerry Announces Yemen Ceasefire Over Objections of Government," *Reuters*, November 15, 2016.
[281] Personal interview, Washington, D.C., February 2018.

negotiations at all, allowing the intervention to continue without pressure to negotiate a settlement.

The United States and the UK have also provided the coalition with diplomatic cover by blocking efforts in the UN Human Rights Council to investigate human rights abuses in Yemen. The UK is the penholder on Yemen-related issues at the UN, the result of an informal division of labor amongst the P3 (the United States, the UK, and France) that gives the UK informal jurisdiction over the Yemen portfolio at the UN. Under this system, the UK is charged with taking the initiative on drafting relevant resolutions and negotiating text with China and Russia.[282] After a serious push by an alliance of countries led by the Netherlands led to three weeks of intense negotiations in September 2017, the United States, UK, and France did finally agree to a compromise text that established an international team of experts to investigate human rights abuses in Yemen. However, Saudi Arabia engaged in intense lobbying throughout the negotiations, and the compromise outcome "spared Saudi Arabia…from a formal panel of inquiry like the one investigating the war in Syria."[283] The UK and the United States therefore provided diplomatic cover sparing Saudi Arabia and the UAE from human rights investigations at the UN that might have placed pressure on the intervening coalition to modify its behavior or negotiate a settlement.

Differences between Saudi Arabia and the UAE's military capacities also help explain why the UAE has put forces on the ground whereas Saudi Arabia's involvement is confined to conducting airstrikes without a significant ground presence in the country. Despite decades of support from the United States and other western powers, Saudi Arabia remains relatively weak

[282] *Security Council Report*, "Penholders and Chairs," February 20, 2018, http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-security-council-working-methods/pen-holders-and-chairs.php (accessed February 28, 2018).
[283] Nick Cumming-Bruce, "In a Compromise, U.N. Rights Experts Will Examine Abuses in Yemen's War," *The New York Times*, September 29, 2017.

in terms of its ability to project military power outside of its own borders. According to Michael Knights, Saudi infantry lack both the experience and logistical equipment to execute an expeditionary operation.[284] Saudi leaders' coup-proofing efforts to limit the effectiveness of their military help explains this relative weakness. Limitations in Saudi Arabia's military capabilities help explain why Saudi Arabia has not attempted to deploy troops on the ground in Yemen: it is unable to do so effectively.

In contrast, the Emirati military has developed significant power projection capabilities as part of a concerted effort to do so over the past decade or so. These efforts continued in the years leading up to the Yemen intervention, with the establishment of the National Defense College in December 2013, the institution of compulsory military service in 2014, and a dramatic increase in military spending from $1.9 billion in 2009 to $3.13 billion in 2015.[285] The UAE's power projection capabilities were necessary (but not sufficient) to explain why the UAE Special Forces have engaged effectively on the ground in Yemen.

Notably, Saudi Arabia and the UAE's military capacity is endogenous to US and western support, both because both countries have received much of their military training and hardware acquisitions from the United States and western powers, and because the United States has provided additional military logistical support to facilitate the intervention. This is particularly true in the case of Saudi Arabia's air campaign: most observers believe that Saudi Arabia would not be able to maintain the high sortie rate without the aerial refueling capacity provided by the United States.[286] Additionally, U.S.-provided aerial refueling facilitates dynamic targeting.[287]

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[284] Quoted in Ben Brimelow, "Saudi Arabia has the best military equipment money can buy—but it's still not a threat to Iran," *Business Insider,* December 16, 2017.
[285] Khalid Almezaini, "The Transformation of UAE Foreign Policy Since 2011," in *The Changing Security Dynamics of the Persian Gulf,* ed. Kristian Coates Ulrichson (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), 200.
[286] Personal interviews, Washington, D.C., November 2017-May 2018.

According to Yadav and Schweller, in addition to the direct support that the coalition receives from the United States, "Saudi pilots trained by American technicians service and keep the planes in the air. American contractors also upgrade the classified software on the planes, including targeting software. Saudi Arabia would be unable to launch air assaults on Yemen without American support and cooperation."[288]

Alternative Explanation 1: Sectarianism/Ideology

Intervention in Yemen is often depicted in sectarian terms, with some commentators describing it as yet another regional conflict between Sunni Muslims, backed by the Sunni Arab states led by Saudi Arabia, and Shi'ia Muslims, with the support of Shi'ia Iran. However, these overly-broad terms over-simplify and mischaracterize the Yemeni civil war.

About 56% of Yemenis are Sunnis, with most Sunnis belonging to the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence, while about 44% are Zaydi Shiia, a branch of Shi'ia Islam that is found almost entirely in Yemen. Zaydism is considered by some to be a form of Shi'ia Islam (although others consider Zaydis to be neither Sunni nor Shi'ia), but is distinguished from the mainstream body of Shi'ias, knows as "twelvers" since they recognize 12 imams while Zaydis recognize five imams. Yemen has not had a history of sectarian tensions—indeed, Zaydis and Sunnis tend to live in the same communities, inter-marry, and even worship in the same mosques, and Zaydism is considered to be doctrinally closer to Sunni Islam than it is to mainstream Shi'ism.[289] While the Houthi insurgency has its roots in Zaydi revivalism, the dynamics of the conflict and reasons for fighting have changed substantially since 2004. The conflict has also never been divided across

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[287] Jeffrey E. Stern, "From Arizona to Yemen: The Journey of an American Bomb," *The New York Times*, December 11, 2018.
[288] Stacey Philbrick Yadav and Jillian Schwedler eds, *The Fight for Yemen,* MERIP report 289, 9.
[289] Christopher Boucek, *War in Saada: From Local Insurrection to National Challenge* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Middle East Program, 2010), 4.

strictly sectarian lines: President Saleh is himself Zaydi, for example, and his government fought the Houthis for several years before aligning with them. As in Syria, sectarianism does not appear to be a driver of the conflict or intervention, but rather is occasionally used instrumentally by the different players, although sectarianism is not as salient a feature of the conflict in Yemen as it is in Syria.

Additionally, the intervening coalition's attempts to frame the conflict in sectarian concerns may not have represented their truly-held views of the conflict as much as an attempt to shape how the international community saw the Houthi insurgency. According to Lynch, the Saudi narrative of sectarian conflict south to strip the Houthis "of their revolutionary identity and successfully framed as a Shi'ite movement backed by Iran. Only that would allow Riyadh to assemble not only a regional coalition, but also a viable grouping of Yemeni forces," including groups as varied as the Islamist Islah to secular southern secessionists militias in loose support for the 'legitimate' government.[290]

Alternative Explanation 2: Domestic Politics

The consolidation of power within the Saudi regime and a generational shift in leadership made the decision to intervene. Over the past few decades, multiple power centers within the regime have checked the most aggressive impulses of one another. However, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's consolidation of power within the Saudi royal family beginning in 2015 has enabled the crown princes of both states to engage in more assertive regional policies.

Since the early 1960's, the Saudi royal family has governed Saudi Arabia through a system that Steffen Hertog describes as 'segmented clientelism,' where the state is comprised of vertical distributional relationships in which institutions and networks of distribution are separate

[290] Lynch, *The New Arab Wars*, 237.

and parallel.[291] This institutional configuration emerged after the power struggle between King Saud and Crown Prince Faisal in the early 1960's. When Faisal prevailed, he rewarded loyal members of the ruling family with the leadership of the ministries of Defense and Civil Aviation, Interior, and the National Guard. Each of these three agencies has subsequently served as a position of power for different factions of the ruling family, forming a tri-polar balancing dynamic within the regime. Each of the three factions have jurisdiction over different security and intelligence institutions with overlapping responsibilities.

This system was created in order to give each faction access to rents and therefore a source of patronage. However, to Hertog, this "pattern of state-building in which rulers have tended to settle conflicts and build alliances within the ruling family by creating new institutions, positions and sources of patronage…has led to an *[sic]* cumulative and redundant state-building process that has stabilized dynastic rule, but has imposed great long-term costs and has made policy coordination in important areas difficult."[292] This dynamic has had the unintended effect of limiting Saudi leaders' ability to intervene militarily in the region, both because coup-proofing efforts have weakened Saudi Arabia's ability to project military power beyond its borders and because factions within the royal family have checked one another's more assertive impulses.

This dynamic shifted after Saudi King Abdullah died on January 23, 2015, just one day after the Houthis forced President Hadi to resign. From the beginning of the reign of his successor King Salman, "the intricate network of Saudi influence and factional balancing, built up for decades by the King's late brother Sultan, appeared on the verge of collapse."[293] Since the ascent of King Salman, his son Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) has taken

[291] Steffen Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 12.
[292] Steffen Hertog, "Rentier Militaries in the Gulf States: the Price of Coup-Proofing," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 43 no. 3 (2011): 400.
[293] Ulrichsen, "Endgames for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen," 31.

increasingly assertive steps to consolidate his authority, pushing out members of the royal family who led other factions who might have been able to check MbS' aggressive foreign policy impulses. MbS has served as Minister of Defense since his father ascended the throne and is widely seen as the architect of Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen. There were also shifts in terms of who within the family held the Yemen portfolio. Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz, who headed the Special Office for Yemen Affairs which was "the main locus of Yemen policy and patronage throughout the 1980s and 1990s," died in 2011. The loss of institutional knowledge with senior members of the Saudi royal family including Crown Prince Sultan led to the erosion of personal relationships and knowledge of the intricate dynamics of Yemeni tribes and politics in Saudi Arabia, which in turn made it more difficult for the regime to manage its relationship with Yemen—or to be able to foresee that a direct military intervention would likely not end well. Thus, the consolidation of power within the Saudi royal family created the conditions that made direct military intervention more likely.[294]

In addition to the consolidation of authority within the Saudi state, the Yemen intervention was also preceded by a generational shift in Saudi leadership. The position of king has been held by the sons of King Ibn Saud since his death; Crown Prince MbS is the first of the next generation to hold the office. MbS shares with Emirati Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ) a drive to reorient the regional balance of power and have similar views on the key issues in security and economic policy facing both countries, and they have built a warm personal relationship around their shared views.[295] MbS and MbZ are seen as the architects of the coalition intervention in Yemen. This generational shift, which led to a shift in the regional policy orientations of both countries, is another factor pushing towards intervention in Yemen.

[294] Ginny Hill and Gerd Nonneman, 2011, *Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States: Elite Politics, street Protests and Regional Diplomacy*, Chatham House Briefing Paper, May 2011, 9.
[295] Ulrichsen, "Endgames for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen," 32.

It is possible that the coalition intervention would have happened in the absence of this generational shift in leadership and consolidation of power within the Saudi and UAE regimes since other structural factors were pushing towards intervention. Michael Stephens notes that "there is a tendency to overestimate the impact of [MbS] on foreign policy, attributing almost all of Riyadh's adventurism to him. [This argument] misunderstands that Saudi calculations were being recalibrated far in advance of the young prince's rise."[296] Saudi Arabia and the UAE may well have begun to pursue more assertive regional policies, including the intervention in Yemen, in response to the structural factors articulated above. However, domestic political factors push in the same causal direction as these structural factors in this case.

This generational shift also led to the loss of institutional and personal connections with important players in Yemen. In the Saudi royal family in particular, senior leaders had built relationships with key officials and tribal leaders in Yemen over the course of several decades. The shift to a new generation of leadership, and the pushing out of other senior leaders in the royal family who had extensive experience working with Yemeni leaders, meant that many of these institutional and personal connections were lost. Some analysts have speculated that the loss of connections has hampered the new Saudi leaderships' ability to understand what is happening on the ground in Yemen, making them over-confident in their ability to achieve their objectives through the use of force rather than more traditional modes of diplomacy in Yemen.[297]

Finally, public opinion has been supportive of the intervention in Yemen, but this is the result of both regime's efforts to sustain support for the intervention by building nationalist narratives and restricting citizens' access to information about the war. The costs of the intervention in terms of resources and military casualties have been relatively high. In order to

[296] Michael Stephens, *The Arab Cold War Redux: The Foreign Policy of the Gulf Cooperation Council States Since 2011 (New York:* The Century Foundation, 2017).
[297] Personal interviews, Washington, D.C., November 2017-May 2018.

counteract the effects of these costs on public opinion, Saudi Arabia has embarked on efforts to promote a national identity that takes pride in the states' ability to project power abroad. These efforts at creating a new nationalist orientation have included national museum projects and patriotic displays like military parades and memorials to 'martyrs' who have died in conflict.[298] Additionally, most ordinary Saudis do not have access to accurate information about what is going on in Yemen as the government restricts access to outside media sources. This facilitates the governments' ability to project a nationalist narrative around the Yemen intervention.

Saudi Arabia's relationship to the Houthi movement prior to their 2014 takeover did affect Saudi official's view of the Houthi takeover in 2014. The Houthi insurgency, also known as Ansar Allah (Supporters of God), formed in the 2004 in Saada governorate near the northern border. The Houthis stem from a Zaydi revivalist movement that began in response to the growing influence of Wahhabi Sunni Islam exported by Saudi Arabia through the religious leaders and schools that it funded beginning in the 1980s. Hussein Badraddin al-Houthi, a leader of the Zaydi revival movement, called on his followers to protest the regime and President Saleh's alignment with the U.S.-led War on Terror. In 2004, Al-Houthi was killed by government forces after several weeks of fighting, and his father and one of his brothers replaced him as leader of the movement. Houthi forces engaged in six rounds of fighting with government forces between 2004 and 2010, known as the Saada Wars, punctuated by tenuous ceasefires.[299] Yemeni government forces' aggressive crackdown on the Houthi movement inflamed tensions in the region and activated broadening circles of resistance to the state. The Saada Wars displaced more than 150,000 people; casualties are difficult to estimate but were likely in the hundreds or even thousands. In response to the government's heavy handedness, more and more northerners,

[298] Kristin Smith Diwan, *Gulf Societies in Transition: National Identity and National Projects in the Arab Gulf States* (Washington, D.C.: Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, 2016), 6.
[299] Boucek, *War in Saada*, 110.

across tribal lines, began to identify with the Houthi resistance movement. The resistance spread to the neighboring governorates of 'Amran and Hajja, and even to Sana'a itself.[300]

Houthi violence in north Yemen was seen by Saudi Arabia as a direct threat to Saudi Arabia's border regions. As described above, the Saudi-Yemeni border had been contested for decades and had not been permanently delineated. Local tribal groups traditionally span the border and cross it regularly, posing a security concern and destabilizing the border. Saudi Arabia's leadership was also concerned that an insecure border could allow AQAP to move from bases in southern Yemen into Saudi Arabia, a concern that was heightened after an effective campaign was waged inside Saudi Arabia to remove al-Qaeda from its territory between 2003 and 2006.[301] According to Marieke Brandt, from the Saudi perspective, "By expelling the most influential shaykhs from their areas along the boundary, the Houthis upset a fragile balance…the Houthi conflict generated a crisis serious enough to destabilize the entire system of bilateral border protection that had evolved since the 1934 Saudi-Yemeni War, which depended heavily on the cooperation and co-optation of the local tribes."[302] Saudi Arabia intervened briefly in the Saada wars in November 2009 in response to Houthi incursions across the border, engaging Houthi forces and conducting airstrikes on Houthi positions.[303] After experiencing setbacks in the fighting, Saudi forces quickly withdrew after re-establishing control over the border.[304]

Saudi leaders' perceptions of the Houthis as a security threat factored into their decision to intervene in Yemen in March 2015. However, Saudi antipathy towards the Houthis is not

[300] Salmoni, Loidolt, and Wells, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen,* 2-9.
[301] Salmoni, Loidolt, and Wells, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen,* 266.
[302] Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen,* 76.
[303] Salmoni, Loidolt, and Wells, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen,* 2.
[304] Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen,* 311.

driven by an affinity for the government that fought against the Houthis, since Saleh had switched sides and aligned his forces with the Houthis by 2015.[305]

Additional Hypothesis: Dynamics of the Conflict

The dynamics of the Yemeni civil war, more specifically President Hadi's role in refusing to end the conflict in a political settlement, also help explain why the civil war in Yemen and the Saudi-led intervention continue. President Hadi's unshakeable position on negotiations is that they must take place on the basis of UNSC 2216, a position that is untenable from the Houthi's perspective.[306] President Hadi and his government are located in Riyadh, and have very little authority on the ground in Yemen beyond the support that they receive from the intervening coalition. If the conflict were to end now, President Hadi would have very little stake in the future of Yemen.

Observers have speculated that as a result, President Hadi believes that he benefits from the continuation of the conflict and has much to lose if it ends, which is why he has reportedly undermined international negotiations, even when the Saudis, Emiratis, and Houthis were all theoretically on board with a settlement framework.[307] Speaking on condition of anonymity, a senior diplomat reportedly said in December 2015 that "Hadi has been trying to block any kind of talks because he knows that any settlement will be the end of his political career. Hadi has never been popular and it's not in his interest that the war stop before complete victory."[308] Indeed, in November 2016, negotiations brokered by Secretary of State John Kerry over the course of several months were close to an agreement that would end the conflict by maintaining

[305] Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis,* 77.
[306] Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*, 62.
[307] Personal interviews, Washington, D.C., November 2017-May 2018.
[308] Quoted in Yara Bayoumy, "Diplomats see Yemen's Hadi Undermining U.N. peace talks," *Reuters*, December 1, 2015.

a ceasefire that had held since April and beginning a process to install a new unity government. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the Houthis were reportedly on board with the agreement as well, but when Secretary Kerry announced the agreement, Hadi's government announced that they were not interested in a ceasefire or negotiations with the Houthis, officially scuttling the deal.[309] A political settlement may have offered the intervening coalition a face-saving way of withdrawing from Yemen, but without such a solution, the intervention continues.

Conclusion

The status anxiety explanation is successful in explaining Saudi intervention in Yemen in 2015. Saudi officials believed that their regional status had declined in the region vis-a-vis their regional opponent, Iran. The Arab Spring protests had led to the downfall of important regional allies like Egyptian President Mubarak and generated instability in others like Bahrain. In 2014 and 2015, the United States had openly negotiated and signed a nuclear agreement with Iran that Saudi Arabia worried would facilitate Iran's support for actors in the region by lifting some international sanctions, and that the agreement could mark the beginning of an American-Iranian détente, threatening the Arab Gulf countries' crucial security relationship with the United States. Finally, a precipitous decline in global oil prices threatened the Arab Gulf states' rentier model of domestic security.

Saudi officials also believed that a Houthi victory in Yemen could contribute further to Saudi Arabia's recent status loss. Saudi Arabia in particular had fought Houthi force in recent years due to concerns that Houthi control of territory in the border region would destabilize the shared border. Saudi leaders were concerned that a Houthi victory would facilitate expanded

[309] *Al Jazeera,* "Kerry Announces Yemen Truce, FM says 'Not Interested,'" November 15, 2016.

Iranian influence in the Gulf peninsula. Emirati officials were also intent on forestalling the rise of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated factions including the Islah party.

Second, regional states' great power relationships also help to explain the extent of intervention, while domestic politics, military capabilities, and the dynamics of the conflict itself also point in the same causal direction. The findings also suggest that military capabilities are important, but are in some cases endogenous to great power support. Military capabilities enable and constrain different levels of intervention, but they do not explain why the Saudi-led coalition chose to use its power projection capabilities in Yemen, or why Iran escalated its involvement in Yemen over the course of the conflict. Additionally, with regards to the domestic politics Hypothesis, bureaucratic political dynamics made continuing intervention more likely, but public opinion does not explain why the coalition has remained involved and escalated their intervention in Yemen since March 2015. Public opinion in Saudi Arabia, to the extent that it can be accurately measured in an authoritarian society that has been increasingly repressive of dissenting opinion in recent years, is better understood as a product of government efforts to shore up support for its policies by generating a virulent new form of nationalist sentiment.[310]

U.S. support for the Saudi-led coalition also facilitated intervention at a higher level on the intervention scale. The Saudi aerial bombing campaign in the north would not have been able to operate at the same tempo without aerial refueling and other forms of logistical military support provided by the United States. The intervention is also facilitated by the military capabilities of the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The UAE's battle-tested Special Forces' capabilities made it possible to deploy troops on the ground, while Saudi Arabia's military weakness and relative lack of power projection capabilities made it unlikely that Saudi Arabia would deploy troops far beyond the border. However, for the coalition, military capabilities are largely

[310] Vivian Nereim, "'Traitor' Is the New 'Infidel' as Nationalism Grips Saudi Arabia," *Bloomberg,* March 3, 2019.

endogenous to their strategic relationship with the United States, both because the United States has provided training and weapons transfers to both countries over the past few decades, building up their military capabilities, and because U.S. assistance to the intervention bolstered the coalition's capability to project power beyond the borders of the key intervening states.

Saudi Arabia's previous relationship with the government played a role in the intervention, but this relationship was closely related to security concerns rather than defending an embattled ally. Saudi officials supported President Saleh's government not because of any love lost for Saleh but because they saw him as a buffer against worse actors, including the Houthis and AQAP. Notably, Saudi officials spearheaded the negotiations in 2011 that pressured Saleh to step down, but continue to support the government of his replacement, Hadi. Sectarian considerations also shaped the conflict and played a role in the intervention, but sectarian explanations are overly-simplistic and do not sufficiently take the Yemeni context into account.

Domestic bureaucratic politics also enabled the coalition intervention. Ruling coalitions that had previously been more factionalized experienced power consolidation in the hands of one leader prior to the Yemen conflict. A generational shift in leadership also made intervention more likely to occur, as younger leaders set out to make their mark on regional politics without the institutional and personal connections of their parents' generation. However, while public opinion appeared favorable to the intervention and to remaining in Yemen, this is the result of both regimes' efforts to stoke nationalist sentiments around their militaries and to prevent citizens from accessing accurate information about the conflict. Public support for the intervention is therefore largely an effect of the intervention, rather than a cause.

Finally, the dynamics of the conflict itself also help to explain why the war—and therefore external interventions—continued. The conflict might have ended when both the

Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition accepted the terms of the Quad proposal in late 2016, but President Hadi's veto scuttled the agreement. However, by late 2016, Hadi had little support or legitimacy within Yemen, and his government had very limited governance capacity, as many of its senior ministers were based in Riyadh. Saudi Arabia therefore had significant leverage over Hadi's government, and if Saudi officials had placed sufficient pressure on Hadi to agree he may not have repudiated the agreement. On the other hand, Hadi had individual agency and would not have benefitted from the Quad agreement, and may therefore have resisted Saudi pressure to accede to a political settlement.

Chapter 3: Egypt

Case Study 1: North Yemen Civil War, 1962-67

In this chapter, I explain why the President of the UAR,[311] Gamal Abdel Nasser, eventually deployed about half of the UAR's total ground forces to a civil conflict in a distant country—one that was viewed as a regional backwater. What drove Nasser's Egypt to invest such a large number of troops in Yemen in an ultimately fruitless effort?

I argue that my two hypotheses explain this puzzle. First, I argue that status anxiety motivated Nasser's decision to intervene in Yemen. Nasser believed that he had suffered a series of defeats, most notably the breakup of the United Arab Republic when Syria seceded from the union in 1961. Accounts of members of his inner circle confirm that Nasser saw intervention in Yemen as a means of pushing back against his increasing isolation in the region.

Second, the UAR's intervention was shaped by its military capabilities, which in turn were largely enabled (and at some points, constrained) by the UAR's relationship with the Soviet Union and the United States. The UAR was able to intervene with ground troops and airstrikes because the Soviet Union provided direct support to the intervention, and because the U.S. administration chose not to use the significant leverage that it possessed over the UAR to push back forcefully against the intervention decision at the beginning of the conflict. In contrast, U.S. officials did exert significant leverage over their Saudi client to prevent Saudi Arabia from escalating their involvement in Yemen.

I also demonstrate that changes in the amount of leverage exerted by the United States and Soviet Union over the course of the conflict were directly linked to variation in the UAR's

[311] Egypt became the United Arab Republic (UAR) when it joined a political union with Syria in 1958. Even though union dissolved in 1961, Egypt continued to be called the UAR until 1971. In this chapter, I use the terms "UAR" and "Egypt" interchangeably, except to describe the state of Egypt before 1958, and to describe the union with Syria between 1958 and 1961.

willingness to remain involved in Yemen. While the UAR did not withdraw its troops until 1967, UAR officials only began to seriously negotiate a specific timeline for withdrawal when the United States began to exert leverage in 1963 by threatening to cut off economic aid. After the United States cut off aid in 1964 and the UAR became increasingly dependent on the Soviet Union, Nasser spent 1964 and 1965 attempting to negotiate a face-saving peace that would facilitate a UAR withdrawal. However, when the United States restored some aid and the USSR offered Nasser a major military aid package in late 1965, he doubled down on the intervention and negotiations with Saudi Arabia broke down.

Hypothesis 1: Status Anxiety

In the lead-up to the coup in Yemen, Nasser had suffered a series of setbacks in his quest for regional hegemony, culminating in the Syrian secession from the UAR in 1961. These setbacks left Nasser increasingly isolated in the region. This turn of events was important in strategic terms because it left Nasser's UAR encircled by regional rivals, but also because these losses constituted a blow to Nasser's regional status, and therefore to his ability to win influence by encouraging the creation of new revolutionary regimes in the region. The fall of the revolutionary regime in Yemen would have constituted a further loss to Nasser's influence in the region, and to the prestige of his revolutionary movement, which he used strategically to gain regional influence. Nasser confidants, scholars, and western intelligence assessments at the time concluded that the Egyptian intervention in Yemen in 1962 was a direct response to these setbacks, and was seen as a means of boosting the morale of Nasser's revolution. It also allowed Nasser to directly threaten Saudi Arabia, his chief rival in the region, from its southern border.

The period from the late 1950's until Nasser's death in 1970 was dubbed the "Arab Cold War" to describe the fierce rivalry that emerged between Nasser's transnational Free Officers Movement, and the conservative monarchies, led by Saudi Arabia.[312] From the time that Nasser took power in Egypt in the 1952 revolution until the late 1950's, his status in the region appeared to be on an upswing. Nasser used "his Arab nationalist program of opposition to Israel and Western influence in the region and his support for Arab unity" instrumentally to appeal directly to Arab publics in Egypt and elsewhere, and thereby to mobilize support across the region.[313] Relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia were cordial through the mid-1950s, and Saudi Arabia and Egypt even signed a bilateral military agreement in 1955 to counter the Hashemite monarchies in Iraq and Jordan. However, the Arab Cold War alignment coalesced in 1957, when the conservative regimes began to feel threatened by Nasser's revolutionary movement. In reaction to an alleged Nasserist coup attempt in April, Jordan's King Hussein dismissed his nationalist cabinet and imposed military rule. In May of that year, Saudi King Saud proposed the foundation of an Islamic conference that would oppose the spread of communism and constitute a "new alignment" in the region.[314] At first, a coup in Iraq in 1958 appeared to be a boon to Nasser, but relations between Nasser and Abd al-Qarim Qasim, the nationalist coup leader who became Prime Minister of Iraq, quickly soured as Qasim emerged as a rival. Nasser also broke off diplomatic ties with Iran in July 1960 in response to the Shah's decision to formally recognize the state of Israel.[315]

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[312] Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War 1958-1964: A Study of Ideology in Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965). While King Saud (formally Saud bin Abdulaziz Al Saud) was nominally king of Saudi Arabia until 1964, his brother Faisal (Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud) took over most of his duties and functioned as the effective head of state beginning in March 1958. Saud was forced to formally abdicate and Faisal was officially named King in 1964; see Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 75-6.
[313] Gause "Saudi Arabia's Regional Security Strategy," 171.
[314] Elie Podeh, *The Quest for Hegemony in the Arab World: The Struggle Over the Baghdad Pact* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 231.
[315] Anthony Nutting, *Nasser* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, Inc, 1972), 280-1.

By 1962, aside from Sudan and Algeria, "virtually every Arab ruler of importance" including the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Tunisia, Morocco, and finally Syria "was, for one reason or another, quarrelling bitterly with Cairo."[316] The U.S. ambassador to Egypt John Badeau observed after a meeting with Nasser in January 1962 that "[Nasser] impressed me as feeling hemmed in by unfriendly and hostile surrounding forces against which he is determined to fight back vigorously…[it is a]pparent to me that Nasser's basic concern is political survival of [his] regime which he links indissolubly with Arab socialism."[317]

The largest blow landed on September 28, 1961, when military officers staged a coup in Syria and seceded from the United Arab Republic. The UAR, formed in February 1958, was intended to be the first step towards a pan-Arab state, and was a demonstration of the power of Nasser's Arab socialist movement: "with the formation of the UAR—the embodiment of the pan-Arab movement—[Nasser] once again emerged as the champion of Arab nationalism."[318] Nasser saw Syria's secession, referred to thereafter as "the *infisal*" (secession), as a critical challenge to his leadership in the region—the fact that he insisted that Egypt continued to be called the UAR until his death in 1970 is indicative of how deeply the Syrian secession affected him.[319] Muhammad Haykal, an Egyptian journalist and close Nasser confidant who often acted as his personal diplomatic representative, later stated that the *infisal* was "the greatest blow to the Arab revolutionary movement."[320] Haykal observed that "Nasser was tormented by the breakup

[316] Nutting, *Nasser*, 287.
[317] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Badeau), January 13, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—United Arab Republic, Box 168, Folder: United Arab Republic General, 7/61-10/61, JFK Library.
[318] Podeh, *The Quest for Hegemony in the Arab World*, 232.
[319] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 35.
[320] Quoted in Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 24.

of the UAR. It had been the first international expression of his dream of Arab unity and it was not revived in his lifetime."[321]

The dissolution of the UAR was a strategic loss in and of itself, as the new Syrian regime quickly emerged as a Nasser opponent, but it was also a major problem for Nasser's wider influence in the region because it damaged the prestige of his Arab socialist movement. "The humiliation inflicted upon Egypt by the Syrian secessionists" weakened the appeal of Nasser's most important tool, his public speeches and propaganda.[322] Indeed, according to Nasser biographer Saïd Aburish, the revolutionary Arab socialist movement "never recovered from the disaster of the UAR."[323] The secession damaged Nasser's image as the leader and protector of the revolutionary movement.[324] As Barnett notes, his "symbolic power" as leader of the revolutionary movement was Nasser's most important tool in contestation for regional influence vis-à-vis the conservative regimes: "Nasser's power derived not from Egypt's military capabilities but from his ability to… establish the norms of Arabism, and to weave a compelling image of the future."[325] Nasser's revolutionary ideology thus served as the primary vehicle for Egypt's competition for regional hegemony.[326] After the secession, a memo to the British Foreign Secretary noted that Nasser's regime had experienced a decline in prestige because "President Nasser and the Egyptian revolution are failing to live up to the idea of their role in the Arab world as a whole," leading to a loss in the "revolutionary impetus" in the region.[327]

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[321] Muḥammad Ḥasanayn Haykal, *The Cairo Documents: The Inside Story of Nasser and his Relationship with World Leaders, Rebels, and Statesmen* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 205.
[322] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 57.
[323] Saïd Aburish, *Nasser: The Last Arab* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004), 153.
[324] Laura James, *Nasser at War: Images of the Enemy* (Berlin: Springer, 2006), 62.
[325] Michael N. Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 7.
[326] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 11.
[327] Memo, from Mr. Crowe to Lord Home, February 14, 1961, "U.A.R.: The State of the Regime," 1959-1963 Egypt, PREM 11/4173, VG 1016/8, Kew UK National Archives.

By the time of the Yemeni coup in September 1962, Nasser was encircled by regional opponents and unable to generate a 'win' for his revolutionary movement. The fall of the new revolutionary regime back into the hands of the royalists in Yemen would have been an additional blow to Nasser's regional status and would likely have generated yet another hostile regime in the region. The UAR's intervention therefore operated from a defensive logic, concerned with preserving the new regime rather than achieving new gains.[328] According to Hamed Mahmoud, chef de cabinet of Egyptian Prime Minister Ali Sabri, the coup in Yemen "came at the time we were feeling that we [needed] a revolution or something to raise our morale."[329] Similarly, a State Department intelligence note suggested that "Nasser Needs Success: In the wake of his continued failure to stage a comeback in Syria, Nasser probably feels the need for some concrete victory in the war he declared against 'reactionaries' following the breakup of the UAR."[330] The survival of the Yemeni revolutionary government was ultimately a strategic question for Nasser because "It would be seen as a victory or defeat in a broader, ongoing struggle against his enemies."[331] Sadat observed that "If we did not go to the Yemen the result would be the revolution would collapse and Saudi Arabia would rule the Arabian Peninsula and then Egypt, so we have to support the Yemeni Revolution."[332] Nasser later stated to Egyptian General Anwar Qadi of the intervention in Yemen, "This is more a political operation than a military one….I consider it to be a counter-response to the separation from Syria. We cannot leave Yemen."[333]

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[328] Fawaz Gerges, "The Kennedy Administration and the Egyptian-Saudi Conflict in Yemen: Co-opting Arab Nationalism," *Middle East Journal* Vol. 49, No. 2 (Spring 1995): 309.
[329] Quoted in James, *Nasser at War*, 53.
[330] Memo from Roger Hilman, State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, "Intelligence Note: Pro-Nasser Army Coup Plot in the Yemen," September 13, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 8/61-9/62, JFK Library.
[331] James, *Nasser at War*, 62.
[332] Quoted in James, *Nasser at War*, 63.
[333] Quoted in James, *Nasser at War*, 76.

The fact that his most important regional rival, Saudi Arabia, was supporting the opposition royalists was additional incentive for Nasser to intervene in Yemen. By gaining a foothold on Saudi Arabia's southern border, Nasser could use increased influence in northern Yemen to directly threaten Saudi Arabia. According to a telegram from Ambassador Badeau in early October 1962, the UAR's intervention served as both "restorer of prestige lost in [the] Syria separation and possible movement toward [the] downfall of Saudi rule."[334] Conversely, Nasser's regional influence would be further damaged if the new Yemeni regime were to be toppled by the Saudi-supported royalists and Saudi Arabia gained influence in Yemen as a result. According to Ferris,

> For the self-proclaimed leader of the Arab world, the unprecedented regional isolation that followed the secession must have been intolerable. The humiliating peak of Egypt's solitude came in August 1962, when the Egyptian delegation walked out of an Arab League summit in Lebanon, which had turned into a verbal lynching of the organization's putative leader. The loss of control over the Arab League, Cairo's principal instrument for the imposition of Egyptian-led solidarity, attested to the depth of Nasser's predicament. One month later, on the eve of the anniversary of the *infisal*, events in Yemen provided a timely opportunity to strike back at Egypt's rivals, capture the moral high ground, and regain the initiative in the Arab Cold War.[335]

Hypothesis 2: Great Power Relationships

In spite of poor tactical and strategic performance in inter-state wars fought in 1948 and 1956, the UAR military had significant conventional military capabilities in comparison with other Arab militaries in the region. Due in part to its role as a "confrontation state" sharing a border with Israel, Egypt invested considerably in military and equipment and training, with significant support from the Soviet Union. After the 1948 war and the Free Officers-led coup in 1952, Egypt began to invest more systematically in its military capabilities. Defense spending

[334] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Badeau), October 6, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 10/1/62-10/8/62.
[335] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 28-29.

more than doubled as a share of GNP from 3.9% in 1950-1 to 8.4% in 1955-6. In addition to increasing domestic expenditure, in 1955 Nasser began working more closely with the Soviets to receive modern weaponry. [336]

But Egyptian military performance during the Suez crisis in 1956 suffered because Egypt had relatively few personnel who were trained and capable of using the Soviet military equipment. Most notably, the Egyptians "had few pilots capable of flying the modern jet fighters they had acquired from the Soviet Union…for example, the EAF had only about thirty pilots qualified to fly its 120 MiG-15s."[337] Thus, although Egypt was able to project conventional military power within its own and contiguous territory, power projection across greater distances was limited without significant logistical assistance. As described in greater detail below, Egypt would not have been capable of deploying such a robust conventional presence in Yemen without significant Soviet assistance, including Soviet Antonov AN-12s that "were doing five to seven sorties a day to supplement ship deliveries from Egypt to" Hodeidah Port throughout the intervention, and "two squadrons of TU-16 bombers [that] were deployed in Egypt with Russian crews to fly combat missions in Yemen."[338]

The civil war coincided with a period of heightened Cold War tensions, including the aftermath of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, the 1958-61 Berlin Crisis, and the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis that took place within the first month of the civil war. Throughout this period, the United

[336] Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 29
[337] Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 39
[338] Bruce Riedel, *Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States Since FDR*, (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), 38.

States and Soviet Union routinely competed for influence in the Third World, acquiring client states and providing support to potential clients in civil wars.[339]

In 1961, Nasser, along with other Third World leaders formally founded the Non-Aligned Movement, a loose affiliation of Third World countries whose leadership pledged to remain neutral in the Cold War. In reality, several of the leaders of this movement, known as the neutralists, used their official non-aligned status to play the United States and Soviet Union off of one another, receiving assistance from both sides. Nasser was perhaps the most skilled of the neutralists in this art, adroitly maneuvering between the United States and Soviet Union, and thereby maximizing the substantial amounts of aid that he received from both without formally affiliating the UAR with either bloc.[340] In 1959, to take just one example, Nasser denounced the communist party in Egypt, and the Soviet Union responded by cutting military assistance to Egypt. In response, Nasser accepted offers of food and economic aid from the United States. Moscow, recognizing that it had overstepped in its attempt to directly control Nasser's policies, resumed the provision of military assistance in order to bolster its position in late 1959.[341]

The United States

This section divides the UAR's intervention into four distinct periods over which the UAR's engagement in the civil war shifted: 1) the beginning of the civil war through formal U.S. recognition of the YAR in December 1962; 2) attempts at disengagement from January 1963 through late 1963; 3) the "inter-Arab thaw" from approximately December 1963 through early 1966; and 4) the resumption of the Arab Cold War through the end of the UAR intervention in late 1967. I demonstrate that these shifts in the dependent variable corresponded with changes in

[339] For a comprehensive history, see Westad, *The Global Cold War*.
[340] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 4.
[341] William H. Mott, *Soviet Military Assistance: An Empirical Perspective* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2001), 86.

U.S. attempts to exert leverage over the UAR. I use process tracing to provide evidence of the causal mechanism linking U.S. leverage to outcomes in terms of the UAR's willingness to remain engaged in the North Yemen civil war.

First, I describe how the Kennedy administration declined to exert the leverage that it possessed over the UAR; as a result, the UAR intervened in Yemen at the highest level of the intervention scale, directly deploying tens of thousands of troops to support the new YAR regime. In the disengagement period, the Kennedy administration only began to threaten the UAR with the withdrawal of aid in late 1963; in response, Nasser promised to withdraw a significant number of troops from Yemen as a gesture towards full disengagement. Third, the Johnson administration became increasingly impatient with Nasser's disregard for U.S. policy preferences, and eventually suspended U.S. aid to the UAR. At about the same time, as I will describe below, the Soviet Union began to put significant pressure on Nasser to make security concessions; Nasser was therefore being squeezed from both sides. As a result, he began to pursue peace in Yemen through face-to-face negotiations with King Faisal, a remarkable turn-around from the hostility of the Arab Cold War. Finally, after the United States resumed much of its aid in late 1965 and the USSR increased the flow of aid to the UAR, Nasser vigorously resumed the fight in Yemen until the 1967 Six Day War, which forced Nasser to unilaterally withdraw from Yemen.

In this section, I demonstrate that the U.S. administration's decision to not exert the leverage that it possessed over the UAR indirectly facilitated the UAR's intervention. Throughout the war, the United States' preference was for the UAR to withdraw from the conflict, leaving a small training force to stabilize the new YAR regime if necessary. Yet variation in the amount of leverage that the United States was willing to exert over the course of

the war suggests that while such attempts were too late to prevent the intervention from occurring at a higher level, they did directly affect the UAR's willingness to sustain the intervention in Yemen.

In the following section, I show that the USSR also largely declined to exert leverage to prevent the UAR from intervening at the outset of the conflict, and in fact vigorously supported the intervention by providing crucial logistical support, especially at the very beginning of the intervention. Taken together, this evidence suggests that great power leverage had a significant affect on the degree of UAR intervention in Yemen, both at the beginning of the intervention and over the course of the conflict.

Recognition (September-December 1962)

When Kennedy came into office in 1961, his administration advocated for engaging more actively with the Third World. He believed that doing so would "prevent the postcolonial states from falling into the lap of the Soviet Union," according to Westad.[342] In the Middle East, these efforts were focused around building a stronger relationship with Nasser. Kennedy administration officials believed that by providing aid and building personal relationships with UAR officials, the United States could over time peel the UAR away from the Soviet bloc and convince Nasser to favor policies that aligned more closely with U.S. preferences. According to John Badeau, the administration's ambassador to Cairo, the Kennedy administration saw Nasser not as a Soviet- or U.S.-sympathizer, but as a "highly pragmatic man" who could serve as "a kind of vaccination" against Soviet influence in the region.[343]

[342] Westad, *The Cold War*, 291.
[343] John Badeau, *The American Approach to the Arab World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 192.

According to Robert Komer, a senior White House official who coordinated the White House's policy on the Yemen civil war, the Kennedy administration's approach to Nasser constituted "an informal, but nonetheless distinct, process in which we sought to gradually achieve a new and more successful relationship with Nasser."[344] The administration began a policy review in 1961 to assess the U.S.-UAR relationship, with the idea that "a few more favorable gestures toward Nasser, such as in the long-term development field, might…lead toward some sort of accommodation which eventually (not now) we might be able to get something substantial in exchange."[345] As part of these efforts, Kennedy appointed John Badeau to the ambassador position. Badeau was an unexpected choice because he was not a career U.S. civil servant, but had spent decades living in Cairo. Badeau had served as President of the American University of Cairo, spoke Arabic fluently, and was highly regarded across the Arab world.[346] Badeau was able to build a particularly close relationship with Nasser, recalling later that he had visited Nasser at his home at least once a month while he served as ambassador, "more than all the Western ambassadors together."[347]

Additionally, Kennedy initiated the exchange of personal letters with Nasser, a particularly valued form of diplomatic communication. In his letters, Kennedy wrote of "mutually beneficial cooperation" between Egypt and the United States, and hinted at further economic assistance, which raised hopes in Cairo.[348] Nasser formally replied in an August 1961 letter that was interpreted by U.S. officials as "extraordinarily warm in tone, mild in language,

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[344] Robert Komer, "Robert W. Komer Oral History Interview-JFK #2," interview by Elizabeth Farmer. John F. Kennedy Library, July 6, 1964, 3. President Kennedy jokingly referred to the North Yemen civil war as "Komer's war" because of Komer's central role in coordinating the U.S. policy towards the conflict.
[345] Memo to Walter Rostow, from Robert Komer, June 2, 1961, National Security Files, Country Files—United Arab Republic, Box 168, Folder: United Arab Republic General, 1/61-6/61, John F. Kennedy Library.
[346] Lawrence Van Gelder, "J.S. Badeau, Former Envoy to Middle East, Dies at 92," *The New York Times*, August 26, 1995, accessed October 14, 2017.
[347] John Badeau, "John S. Badeau Oral History Interview-JFK #1," interview by Dennis J. O'Brien. John F. Kennedy Library, February 25, 1969.
[348] Quoted in James, *Nasser at War*, 55.

forthcoming, and hopeful for the relations of the two countries in the future."[349] State Department officials optimistically predicted in 1961 that "the pendulum in U.S.-U.A.R. relations is thus now swinging again in our direction."[350] Nasser later personally credited Kennedy with improving the U.S.-UAR relationship by establishing a level of personal confidence and trust between the two leaders.[351]

When the civil war broke out in Yemen, the U.S. administration responded with a policy of containment. U.S. officials frankly believed that Yemen was "of no importance in itself" with regards to U.S. security interests, except that it had the potential to become "a kind of vortex" which would draw in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and thereby potentially drag the United States into a confrontation with the Soviet Union.[352] Throughout the course of the war, therefore, the United States sought to end all foreign intervention and to prevent escalation and the spread of the conflict in the region, while protecting U.S. interests and preventing the USSR from gaining an enhanced position in Yemen.[353] U.S. officials worked to negotiate an agreement whereby the UAR would withdraw from Yemen, although the State Department acknowledged that "While we [are] firmly opposed [to] 'turn over' Yemen to UAR, we could not object to [a] UAR effort [to] maintain reasonable influence in Yemen by means of supplying technicians, advisers or even military training mission."[354]

However, until late 1963, the U.S. administration was unwilling to exert the considerable leverage that it possessed to coerce the UAR into withdrawing its combat forces. The United

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[349] Ibid.
[350] Memo from Phillips Talbot, to George C. McGhee, "Subject: Prospects for Dealing with President Nasser," May 30, 1961, National Security Files, Country Files—United Arab Republic, Box 168, Folder: United Arab Republic General, 1/61-6/61, JFK Library.
[351] Gerges, "The Kennedy Administration and the Egyptian-Saudi Conflict in Yemen," 308.
[352] Robert Komer, "Robert W. Komer Oral History Interview-JFK #2," interview by Elizabeth Farmer. John F. Kennedy Library, July 6, 1964, 10.
[353]State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, January 11, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Folder: Yemen General, 12/62, JFK Library.
[354] Ibid.

States' greatest source of leverage over the UAR at the time of the coup was Public Law 480 (PL-480), also known as the "Food for Peace" program, which allowed the Department of Agriculture to sell surplus food products to developing countries. As a result of rapid population growth, limited arable land, and low foreign currency reserves, the UAR depended heavily on the food aid it received through Food for Peace: by the outbreak of the civil war in Yemen, the United States provided more than half of Egypt's net food supply.[355] Furthermore, under the terms of PL-480, Egypt was able to purchase U.S. wheat with Egyptian pounds, freeing up scarce foreign currency reserves.[356]

The UAR's intervention in Yemen happened to coincide with the end of a negotiation process that would allow the UAR to purchase $390 million worth of food over a three-year period—prior to October 1962, the deal had to be renegotiated on an annual or bi-annual basis; the three-year extension was therefore a considerable gain for the UAR.[357] U.S. officials were aware of this fact, and Komer raised the issue in a memo to Kennedy on October 5, 1962: "Nasser probably wants the agreement now so he can show U.S. backs him despite Yemen…Do we want to encourage Nasser at just this point or make him sit a bit?" But in the same memo, Komer concluded "I'd say go ahead, primarily because we've already delayed so long, and our Nasser policy is more important than that toward Yemen."[358]

The fact that U.S. officials went ahead with the agreement at a moment when stalling could have provided considerable leverage is indicative of the administration's decision to prioritize the relationship with Nasser over Yemen. According to Ambassador Badeau's recollections, the decision to extend PL-480 aid "was really in line with what Kennedy was

[355] James, *Nasser at War*, 92.
[356] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 102-3.
[357] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 105.
[358] Memo from Robert Komer, to President Kennedy, October 5, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—United Arab Republic, Box 168, Folder: United Arab Republic General, 3/62-4/62, JFK Library.

doing. Kennedy tried to get along with Egypt. Not by giving in to them, but he said, 'Let's make a fresh effort and buy anything that's reasonable and will set the stage for better relations.'"[359] In fact, Badeau was explicitly instructed not to threaten to draw out approval of new aid projects.[360] The State Department instructed Badeau that "It is not our intention to put [the] whole developing U.S.-UAR relationship in the balance at this time."[361]

U.S. allies Saudi Arabia and Jordan were both furious to learn that recognition was moving forward without their input. The U.S. ambassador in Jeddah claimed that Faisal was "absolutely furious; I've never seen the man so angry in my life. Here we'd been a close friend of Saudi Arabia, and he was handed a *fait accompli*."[362] Similarly, Badeau later wrote that the Jordanians strenuously protested the U.S. recognition decision, and even threatened to seek Soviet assistance.[363] U.S. officials also recognized that UAR promises to withdraw in December 1962 did not mean much. A State Department telegram dated October 21, 1962 acknowledged that "From talks with Egyptians to date we only have pious words."[364] U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Parker Hart suggested that "we obtain something more than a token withdrawal (i.e. battalion) preliminary to actual withdrawal of UAR forces before we announce recognition [of the] YAR."[365] However, in spite of the furious opposition of Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and the

[359] John Badeau, "John S. Badeau Oral History Interview-JFK #1," interview by Dennis J. O'Brien. John F. Kennedy Library, February 25, 1969, 19.
[360] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, October 21, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 10/16/62-10/31/62, JFK Library.
[361] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, October 15, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 10/16/62-10/31/62, JFK Library.
[362] Parker Hart, "Parker T. Hart Oral History Interview--JFK #1," interview by Dennis J. O'Brien, May 27, 1969, 16.
[363] Badeau, *The American Approach to the Arab World,* 193.
[364] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, October 21, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 207, Folder: Yemen General, 10/16/62-10/31/62, JFK Library.
[365] Memo from the State Department, to McGeorge Bundy, "Subject: United States Recognition of the Yemen Arab Republic," December 6, 1962, National Security Files—Yemen, Folder: Yemen General, 12/62, JFK Library.

fact that no one put much stock in the promises made by the UAR, the U.S. administration decided to go ahead with recognition.

U.S. officials' decision to not attempt to exercise leverage over the UAR, in combination with Soviet support for the intervention (below), allowed the UAR to move forward with deploying troops and conducting air operations in Yemen. According to Ferris, the U.S. afforded recognition, essentially a win for the UAR, "without any tangible demonstration of Egypt's willingness to withdraw."[366] By December 1962, there were approximately 10,000-15,000 UAR troops in Yemen.[367] On November 2nd, 5th, and 6th of 1962, the UAR began to bomb the Saudi cities of Jizan and Najran near the border.

In spite of this provocation, a direct attack on the territory of a U.S. security partner, U.S. policy towards the UAR remained unchanged, although U.S. diplomats officially registered their objections with UAR officials.[368] Additionally, U.S. officials pressed ahead with a plan, negotiated with UAR officials but not with Saudi Arabia, to formally recognize the YAR regime. The United States became one of the first countries to recognize the Yemen Arab Republic on December 19, 1962. On the same day, by a previously negotiated agreement, the UAR released a statement saying that Yemen would not be used as a base to launch attacks against Saudi Arabia or the British protectorates in the south, and that it was willing to begin a gradual withdrawal on an unspecified timeline.[369] Nevertheless, the UAR did not begin to withdraw at this stage—in fact, the UAR resumed bombing the Saudi cities of Jizan and Najran, where military aid to the royalists was being staged before crossing the border into Yemen, just eleven days later. In January, as the air strikes on Saudi towns continued, the UAR dropped bundles of weapons and

[366] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 110.
[367] Ahmad Yusuf, *Al-Dawr al-Masri fil Yaman*, Cairo: Dal al-Kutub al-Misriyah al-Ammah, 1981, p. 201-210.
[368] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, November 9, 1962, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Folder: Yemen General, 11/1/62-11/15/62, JFK Library.
[369] James, *Nasser at War*, 70.

other supplies intended for Saudi dissidents onto Saudi territory. The UAR also continued to expand its troop presence in Yemen: the number of UAR troops on the ground had doubled, to 28,000, by March 1963.[370]

Disengagement (January-late 1963)

Once the Kennedy administration had negotiated recognition of the YAR regime, their attention turned to trying to broker a disengagement agreement. In March 1963, President Kennedy's personal emissary Ellsworth Bunker shuttled between Cairo, Jeddah, and Sana'a, eventually concluding an agreement in mid-April 1963.[371] According to the terms of the agreement, the UAR would begin withdrawing its forces and Saudi Arabia would end its support for the royalists. Additionally, the UN Yemen Observer Mission (UNYOM), deployed in July 1963, stationed 189 UN personnel in a demilitarized zone on either side of the Saudi-Yemen border to monitor the implementation of the Bunker agreement.[372]

U.S. officials did not attempt to exert significant pressure on the UAR during the lead-up to disengagement. Although the UAR did agree to the disengagement proposal, they likely did so because so little was asked of them. Even U.S. officials acknowledged that the agreement only required the UAR to withdraw "token forces" from Yemen while requiring that Saudi Arabia cut off all aid entirely. However after UNYOM was deployed, as the UAR showed no signs of following through on even this superficial commitment (in spite of the fact that Saudi aid had declined considerably), the Kennedy administration began to increase the amount of pressure on Nasser, threatening both the improved U.S.-UAR relationship and to withdraw U.S. aid. In response, Nasser began to make specific commitments to withdraw troops. Some sources

[370] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 114-5.
[371] Gerges, "The Kennedy Administration and the Egyptian-Saudi Conflict in Yemen," 306.
[372] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War,* 85.

indicate that the UAR had begun to withdraw troops by the end of 1963 (although this proved difficult to confirm).

In early 1963, in spite of the vague promises made during the recognition agreement, the UAR continued to escalate its intervention in Yemen. UAR troop levels increased during the Ramadan Offensive in February through March 1963, a UAR campaign to attempt to retake territory that royalist forces had seized in December and January.[373] The UAR also stepped up the tempo of its bombing campaign of Jizan and Najran,[374] and continued its campaign of "propaganda warfare"[375] against Saudi Arabia, raising concerns that Nasser was "quite possibly intending [to] use force and armed subversion to overthrow Faysal."[376] Nasser saw the disengagement agreement as a useful means of consolidating the military success achieved by the UAR and the YAR in February even as the intervention continued.[377]

In spite of this, the U.S. administration did not attempt to exert leverage over the UAR until several months after the disengagement agreement had been concluded. At the time of the Bunker agreement, the United States only required Nasser to make a vague agreement to begin withdrawing UAR forces from Yemen for his part of the disengagement agreement. According to Komer, "It was left very loose when the Egyptians would withdraw, how many troops they would withdraw… we thought it by far the wise course to appear to take their assurances at face value and see what we could get" rather than pressuring UAR officials to agree to a specific

[373] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 69.
[374] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, March 13, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 208, Folder: Yemen General, UAR Cables, 1/63/3/63, JFK Library.
[375] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, January 10, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 208, Folder: Yemen General, 1/63, JFK Library.
[376] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, March 3, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 208, Folder: Yemen General, UAR Cables, 1/63-3/63, JFK Library.
[377] Yusuf, *Al-Dawr al-Masri fil Yaman*, pp. 217-8.

withdrawal timeline.[378] In fact, in the lead-up to the Bunker agreement, U.S. officials suggested to their UAR counterparts that Nasser would only need to make a "symbolic withdrawal of [a] military unit from Yemen without prejudice to UAR['s] military position."[379] In July 1963, Ambassador Badeau was instructed to convey that "we believe [the] situation would be materially eased if President Nasser could see his way clear to making [the] following steps: a) make an immediate public withdrawal of at least token forces," and cooperate with the UN observer mission.[380]

U.S. officials did register their disapproval of the UAR escalation, particularly of the continued bombing of Saudi cities. However, while explaining on these occasions that, for example, "We [are] deeply disturbed by report of new UAR bombing attack," U.S. officials did not threaten to withdraw aid or even that the U.S.-UAR relationship would suffer if the bombing continued.[381] Indeed, the State Department cautioned U.S. diplomats that the United States "must remain [a] friend of both [the] UAR and Saudi Arabia."[382]

However, the U.S. administration began to lose patience with Nasser after the Bunker agreement was concluded. According to Komer, as 1963 wore on, "we began to feel maybe we'd ought to put the blocks to Nasser a little harder. Maybe, instead of using the carrot, we ought to shift a little while using the stick."[383] In response to this increased pressure, UAR officials

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[378] Robert Komer, "Robert W. Komer Oral History Interview-JFK #2," interview by Elizabeth Farmer. John F. Kennedy Library, July 6, 1964, 18.
[379] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, January 10, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 208, Folder: Yemen General, 1/63, JFK Library.
[380] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, July 11, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 208a, Folder: Yemen General, 7/63, JFK Library.
[381] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, March 13, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 208, Folder: Yemen General, UAR Cables, 1/63-3/63, JFK Library.
[382] State Dept. Outgoing Airgram, "Subject: Rationale for US Policy toward Yemen," March 2, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 208, Folder: Yemen General, 3/63, JFK Library.
[383] Robert Komer, "Robert W. Komer Oral History Interview-JFK #2," interview by Elizabeth Farmer. John F. Kennedy Library, July 6, 1964, 20.

promised to withdraw a 'sizeable' force from Yemen in August 1963.[384] It is difficult to confirm that the UAR actually withdrew the numbers of troops that it claimed, in part because troops rotated in and out of theater on a regular basis. However, a leaked copy of the UN Secretary General's report on the UN mission suggested that by late August 1963, about 7,000-8,000 UAR troops had been withdrawn and an additional 1,500 had arrived in-theater, suggesting that on balance, 6,000-7,000 had been withdrawn.[385]

U.S. officials nevertheless remained frustrated that the UAR did not appear to be sufficiently committed to disengagement and had not committed to a withdrawal timeline. Thus in the fall of 1963, U.S. officials continued to dial up the pressure on the UAR, explicitly threatening for the first time during the intervention that U.S. aid would be withdrawn if the UAR did not cooperate. Badeau was instructed to convey to Nasser that, in spite of President Kennedy's reluctance to do so, "we were going to have to reexamine this whole U.A.R. policy I've been describing; i.e. make an implicit threat of withdrawal of U.S. aid and maybe something worse if Nasser didn't come around."[386] On October 21, 1963, for example, Badeau described a meeting with Nasser where Badeau "expressed my personal disquiet at foreseeable effects of continuing Yemen imbroglio on UAR-USA relations," explaining that the failure of the UNYOM mission could generate negative views of the UAR amongst the U.S. public, which "could seriously circumscribe [the] ability of [the] administration to carry through given foreign policy."[387]

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[384] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, July 29, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 208a, Folder: Yemen General, 7/63, JFK Library.
[385] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Boswell), National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 208a, Folder: Yemen General, 8/63, JFK Library.
[386] Robert Komer, "Robert W. Komer Oral History Interview-JFK #2," interview by Elizabeth Farmer. John F. Kennedy Library, July 6, 1964, 25.
[387] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Badeau), October 21, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 208a, Folder: Yemen General, 9/63, JFK Library.

During another meeting in October 1963 in Washington with the UAR Minister of Economy, U.S. officials "made it quite plain that further United States Government aid to the United Arab Republic is to a great extent dependent upon satisfactory performance in Yemen. We intend in other ways to use the carrot and the stick in our forthcoming approaches to the United Arab Republic."[388] A week later, in another meeting between Badeau and Nasser, Badeau again directly threatened the withdrawal of U.S. aid. Nasser protested, but then immediately proceeded to negotiate the terms of UAR withdrawal in the same meeting, "thereby implicitly accepting the linkage" between U.S. aid and the UAR intervention.[389] During this meeting, Nasser confirmed that 6,000 troops would be permanently withdrawn by the beginning of November and that the UN Secretary General had been informed of this commitment.[390] The following day, a senior UAR official reported that the UAR intended to withdraw an additional 5,000 troops by January 1, 1964, in addition to the previously announced withdrawal of 6,000 troops.[391] Komer confirmed in a memo to President Kennedy that "Nasser's reply to Badeau's latest pitch shows some give."[392] Thus, as U.S. officials began to exert leverage more directly over UAR officials, going so far as to threaten to cut off U.S. aid if the UAR did not cooperate on disengagement, the UAR began to withdraw troops and commit to a more concrete timeline for withdrawal.

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[388] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, October 22, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 208a, Folder: Yemen General, 9/63, JFK Library.
[389] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 127.
[390] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Badeau), October 27, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—United Arab Republic, Box 169, Folder: United Arab Republic General, 6/63-8/63, JFK Library.
[391] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Badeau), October 28, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Folder: Yemen General, 9/63, JFK Library.
[392] Memorandum for the President, from Robert Komer, October 28, 1963, National Security Files, Robert W. Komer Papers (Series 12), Box 448, Folder: Yemen 4/1/63-11/30/63 (White House Memoranda), JFK Library.

Inter-Arab Thaw (late 1963-early 1966)

President Johnson, who was sworn in on November 22, 1963, was even less inclined than Kennedy to accept Nasser's reassurances at face value. Domestic opposition to aid for Nasser had grown in the United States. On November 7, 1963, Congress passed the Gruening amendment, which was aimed specifically at Nasser and prohibited aid to any country deemed to be engaging in aggression against the United States or any recipients of U.S. foreign aid.[393] Additionally, a series of events in the UAR over the course of 1964, including Nasser's policies in the Congolese civil war, Khruschev's visit to Cairo in May, and the burning of the American embassy's library in November 1964, further strained the U.S.-UAR relationship and made the Johnson administration more inclined to withdraw U.S. aid.

The Johnson Administration began to use U.S. aid as leverage to affect the UAR's behavior in early 1964, when U.S. officials declined to commit to giving the UAR a requested $20 million commodity loan that would help to stabilize the UAR economy. U.S. officials deliberately withheld the loan as a signal to Nasser that he could lose more aid if he did not seriously work to end the UAR intervention in Yemen. U.S. officials explicitly linked the loan to the Yemen intervention, noting that it would be offered on the condition that the UAR "reduce the economic drain of its Yemen operations,"[394] and expressing to Nasser directly "concern over the Yemen operation and the fear that even indirectly our aid might be financing it."[395]

In December 1964, the United States escalated its efforts to coerce the UAR by withholding payments that were part of the current PL-480 agreement and indefinitely

[393] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 127-129.
[394] Memorandum for McGeorge Bundy, from Benjamin H. Reed, "Subject: Loan to the UAR, State," February 14, 1964, National Security Files, Country Files—United Arab Republic, Box 158, Folder: United Arab Republic Volume 1, 11/63-5/64 [4 of 4], Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (LBJ).
[395] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Battle), December 19, 1964, National Security Files, Country Files—United Arab Republic, Box 159 [1 of 2], Folder: United Arab Republic Volume 2, 6/64-12/64, LBJ Library.

postponing negotiations for a new PL-480 agreement. Komer reported to President Johnson on December 2nd that in addition to holding off on the commodity loan, the United States had $44 million in aid that was in process but had not yet been disbursed to the UAR, and "we are holding up another $54 million…We've also been playing hard to get for some time on a $20 million loan we promised the UAR if it sped up withdrawal from Yemen."[396]

The cutoff of U.S. and Soviet aid (see below) in the same timeframe had a major effect on the UAR's economy, exacerbating an economic crisis that was already brewing by exacerbating the foreign currency shortage. As a result of this crisis, UAR officials were forced to engage in a frantic round of diplomacy around the world in search of new loans and stays of payment on existing debt.[397] The UAR ambassador to the United States' repeated attempts to raise concerns with the U.S. administration demonstrated Nasser's concern about the withholding of aid. In October 1964, for instance, UAR Ambassador Kamel told State Department officials that the UAR saw the $20 million loan as a "weathervane of USG intentions" towards the UAR.[398]

Although Nasser did not withdraw from Yemen in 1964, fighting died down considerably in the period that both the United States and Soviet Union threatened and eventually suspended aid to the UAR. Perhaps more surprisingly, although they had been in the midst of a bitter rivalry, beginning in January 1964 Nasser and Faisal embarked on a remarkable period of reconciliation. In a period that Barnett refers to as the "era of summitry," Nasser and Feisal

[396] Memorandum for the President, from Robert Komer, December 2, 1964, National Security Files, Country Files—United Arab Republic, Box 159 [1 of 2], Folder: United Arab Republic Volume 2, 6/64-12/64, LBJ Library.
[397] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 140.
[398] State Dept. Memorandum of Conversation, "Subject: UAR Commodity Loan," Participants: Dr. Mostafa Kamel, Ambassador for the United Arab Republic, NEA: NE Harrison M. Symmes, October 22, 1964, National Security Files, Country Files—United Arab Republic, Folder: United Arab Republic Volume 2, 6/64-12/64, LBJ Library.

engaged in a series of regional summits where they engaged in face-to-face talks, attempting to negotiate an end to the fighting in Yemen, among other issues.[399]

On January 13th through 16th 1964, Nasser hosted the first of a series of conferences of the Arab heads of state in Cairo. The Cairo Conference "set in motion a dynamic of détente that, abetted by conciliatory winds blowing from Cairo, produced a Saudi-Egyptian rapprochement within weeks."[400] As a mark of the drastically improved relationship, in March 1964 Nasser sent a high-level delegation to Saudi Arabia, where both parties agreed to restore diplomatic relations, renounce all of their ambitions in Yemen, and declare their support for a free, independent Yemen. The initiation of high-level contacts between the UAR and Saudi Arabia also temporarily ended the propaganda war between them.[401]

A second summit of Arab leaders was held in Alexandria in September 1964. During this summit, Nasser and Faisal held a series of sideline discussions on Yemen that continued for several days after the summit had formally ended. These discussions concluded with a secret agreement that both sides would work towards a ceasefire in Yemen, that Saudi Arabia would stop providing aid to the Royalists, and that the UAR would completely withdraw its forces in stages. They also agreed to hold negotiations in Yemen between royalist and republican delegates. The conference in Yemen was held in late October through early November 1964. The delegates, prodded respectively by their Saudi and Egyptian patrons, agreed to hold a peace conference in late November. This conference was never held because delegates were unable to agree on key logistical questions including the location and the proportion of representatives

[399] Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, 122.
[400] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 217.
[401] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 218.

from each side, but the ceasefire was still implemented at the behest of the Egyptians and Saudis and went into effect for several weeks before it was broken.[402]

The available evidence suggests that the peace conference was hamstrung by the Yemeni delegates in spite of the efforts of their Egyptian and Saudi patrons, who both secretly agreed to abandon their more extreme clients in an attempt to reach an agreement.[403] Spoilers within both delegations, especially President Sallal on the republican side and Imam Badr on the royalist side, were able to derail the negotiations, but this was in spite of Saudi and Egyptian intentions. There were also significant divisions within the republican delegation which deepened as an Egyptian departure from Yemen appeared more likely, which substantially complicated the negotiations. In December 1964, three prominent members of the YAR government resigned, and one formed a new political party that called for the withdrawal of the UAR from Yemen.[404]

In spite of such intra-Yemeni problems in the peace process, the leadership of the UAR and Saudi Arabia continued their efforts to end the civil war. UAR-Saudi negotiations continued in secret during the spring of 1965 between the Saudi ambassador and UAR officials in Cairo. In August 1965, Nasser visited Jeddah where he and Faisal agreed to the Jeddah Accord. The agreement stipulated that Yemenis would hold a popular plebiscite by November 23, 1966 to select a new government, and that in the meantime they would agree to an interim government. It also created the most specific timeline for UAR withdrawal since the beginning of the conflict: the UAR agreed to begin withdrawing troops from Yemen starting on November 23, 1965 and to completely withdraw all troops within 10 months. Saudi Arabia also agreed to cease all aid to the royalists, and both sides agreed to a ceasefire.[405] According to Ferris, "The [Jeddah] agreement's

[402] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 225-7.
[403] Gause, *Saudi-Yemeni Relations*, 68.
[404] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 225-8.
[405] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 110.

most noteworthy aspect is the extent of Nasser's concessions," including the strict timeline for withdrawal and his agreement that Yemenis should be able to decide on their own form of government.[406]

U.S. officials saw an explicit link between withholding U.S. economic aid to the UAR and Nasser's efforts to negotiate his way out of Yemen over the course of 1964 and '65. In late 1963, Badeau reported that the UAR was "casting around for new approaches and means of improving its relations with Saudi Arabia…aid has been and will continue to be a useful, if limited, means of pressure."[407] In December 1964, Komer reported to the Johnson that "we have more and more evidence that Nasser wants to avoid a break with us… we've already held up any new aid programs for about 18 months…Hence Nasser knew that we were playing it cool with him" and "we have good leverage" over Nasser.[408] Secretary of State Rusk noted in May 1965 that the recent pattern of UAR initiatives around Yemen, including a "[p]olicy of restraint toward Saudi Arabia despite [the] Saudi contribution to recent royalist successes," were evidently intended to "requalify UAR for U.S. aid."[409] Finally, the U.S. ambassador to the UAR noted in June 1965 that "Nasser's conduct has take a decided turn for the better…UAR is genuinely and anxiously searching for any Yemen settlement" at the same time that U.S. officials were "getting countless queries and expressions of concern re remaining $37 million from all Egyptians we see."[410] These assessments strongly suggest that the moderation in Nasser's behavior towards

[406] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 241.
[407] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Badeau), December 10, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—United Arab Republic, Box 161, Folder: Yemen Volume 1, 11/63-6/64 [1 of 2], LBJ Library.
[408] Memorandum for the President, from Robert Komer, National Security Files, Country Files—United Arab Republic, Box 159 [1 of 2], Folder: United Arab Republic Volume 2, 6/64-12/64, LBJ Library.
[409] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, May 21, 1965, Country Files—United Arab Republic, Box 159 [1 of 2], Folder: United Arab Republic Volume 3, 11/64-6/65 [3 of 4], LBJ Library.
[410] State Dept. Incoming Telegram (Battle), June 21, 1965, National Security Files, Country Files—United Arab Republic, Box 159 [2 of 2], Folder: United Arab Republic Volume 4, 6/65-6/66 [2 of 6], LBJ Library.

Saudi Arabia, and his participation in Yemen peace negotiations, was directly connected to the withdrawal of U.S. economic aid.

The détente period of the Arab Cold War in 1964 and 1965 was driven on the Egyptian side by the increased pressure from both the United States and the Soviet Union (see below) and by the financial crisis that was triggered by the suspension of aid: Nasser sought to draw down troops in Yemen to appease U.S. and Soviet officials and thereby to relieve domestic pressure on the economy brought about by the suspension of U.S. and Soviet aid.[411]

Resumption of the Arab Cold War (early 1966-1967)

In late-1965, around the time that the Jeddah agreement was reached, both the United States and Soviet Union resumed their aid to the UAR. The United States began the limited resumption of wheat sales in late June 1965 and allowed NGOs to give $11.6 million in agricultural equipment to the UAR. In order to do so, President Johnson circumvented the Gruening amendment by issuing a presidential order.[412] The United States informed the UAR that they would move forward with negotiations for a new PL-480 agreement in November 1965, just a few months after the Jeddah Accord was agreed.[413] A U.S. policy assessment later determined that the signing of the Jeddah Accord in August marked the high point of UAR-Saudi cooperation over Yemen, but that the good will dissipated "within four months."[414] Due to the resumption of aid, Nasser dropped peace efforts and resumed fighting in Yemen. Between the

[411] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 232.
[412] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 126.
[413] State Dept. Outgoing Telegram, November 17, 1965, National Security Files, Country Files—United Arab Republic, Box 159 [2 of 2], Folder: United Arab Republic Volume 4, 6/65-6/66 [2 of 6], LBJ Library.
[414] State Dept. Incoming Airgram (Embassy Jidda), "Subject: Annual U.S. Policy Assessment—Saudi Arabia," March 30, 1966, National Security Files, Country Files—Saudi Arabia, Box 155, Folder: Saudi Arabia Volume 1, 12/63-4/67 [1 of 4], LBJ Library.

fall of 1965 and early 1966, the Arab Cold War gradually resumed as the UAR and Saudi Arabia were unable to come to a lasting peace agreement in Yemen.

By late 1966, Nasser had once again doubled down in Yemen. In February 1966, when the British announced the beginning of their withdrawal from Aden, Nasser made a speech announcing that due to the failure of the Jeddah agreement, "we are revising our plans so that we may stay in the Yemen if necessary for five years or longer."[415] He also announced a new offensive in Yemen, called the "Strategy of the Long Breath," on March 22, 1966, "his biggest Yemen offensive to date."[416] The overall number of UAR troops in Yemen was reduced, but the remaining troops were redeployed in the triangle created by the cities of Sana'a, Hodeida, and Taiz.[417] Nasser's public speeches and the Long Breath strategy made it "increasingly obvious that [the UAR] did not intend to withdraw from Yemen."[418]

The Long Breath was accompanied by the resumption of an overtly hostile orientation towards Saudi Arabia, and Nasser resumed propaganda attacks that had been halted after the Jeddah agreement. In July 1966 Nasser called for the next Arab summit, to be held in September, to be postponed indefinitely, because "we cannot sit side by side with reactionaries."[419] In January 1967, the deposed Saudi King Saud fled to Cairo where he was welcomed publicly by Nasser and enlisted in the propaganda campaign, giving anti-Faisal addresses on Cairo Radio. [420] The UAR also resumed its bombing campaign of Najran and Jizan, halted during Arab thaw, in October 1966.[421]

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[415] James, *Nasser at War*, 83.
[416] Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 93.
[417] Gause, *Saudi-Yemeni Relations*, 70.
[418] James, *Nasser at War*, 83.
[419] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 260-1.
[420] Gause, *Saudi-Yemeni Relations,* 70.
[421] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 106.

The UAR also began to use chemical weapons in a concerted way in Yemen beginning in 1967. Although the UAR had employed poison gas bombs sporadically since 1963, these earlier chemical weapons were relatively rudimentary. However, in January 1967, the UAR air force began to employ more sophisticated chemical weapons in larger numbers. There were 24 reported uses of chemical weapons by the UAR air force in Yemen between January and August 1967, with at least 800 Yemeni civilians killed in these attacks. The chemical weapons attacks drew widespread attention in the international media and were discussed by western policymakers. However, the fact that "The international community failed to censure Egypt's use of poison gas in Yemen" and that U.S. officials declined to take the lead on condemning the use of poison gas against civilians likely encouraged their continued use until the UAR withdrew from Yemen in late 1967.[422]

The Soviet Union

This section is organized by three phases of the Soviet Union's relationship with the UAR during the Yemeni civil war: 1) outbreak of war, from 1962-64; 2) the inter-Arab thaw, from early 1964 through early 1966; and 3) the Arab Cold War resumes in late 1965/early 1966 through 1967.

Under Khrushchev's leadership the Soviet Union saw anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist movements in the Third World as opportunities for Soviet diplomacy. Beginning in 1955, Soviet foreign policy increasingly prioritized building relationships with Third World regimes. However, Khrushchev's strategy was intended to minimize U.S. influence in these regions by gaining potential Soviet allies, rather than to nurture nascent communist movements.[423]

[422] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 129-138.
[423] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 10.

Khrushchev proclaimed in January 1961 that the Soviet Union had an obligation to assist the regimes of states recently freed from colonialism, even if those regimes were not yet communist in their ideological orientation. Renewed attention to Third World regimes had the added strategic benefit of distracting the United States and its client regimes at the time that the question of West Berlin was also being settled. The Soviet decision to support such Third World regimes was not driven solely by ideology: as Ferris notes, "The cynical rapidity with which Soviet leaders dropped" their support for Imam Badr after the Yemen coup in favor of the revolutionary regime "proves just how malleable the new doctrine of Third World interventions could be."[424]

The mid-to-late 1950's also presented the Soviet Union with a valuable opportunity to seek greater influence in the region vis-à-vis the west: after the Suez Crisis, western allies were divided; the British had begun to withdraw from the region, leaving a power vacuum in their wake; and anti-colonial nationalist forces were emerging in Syria, Iraq, and potentially Lebanon. At the same time, Nasser's regime had just begun a widespread nationalization program and economic planning had become an important piece of domestic state policy, creating an opening for Soviet development aid and technical advisors to increase their involvement.[425]

Soviet support for Nasser was intended to facilitate Soviet influence in the strategically important MENA region. Beginning in 1955, Nasser began to serve as a kind of hub of Soviet policy in the region, retaining the principle decision-making role in terms of which regimes in the region could be recipients of Soviet aid. Nasser facilitated nascent relationships between the USSR and his allies, and routed Soviet assistance away from his opponents, like Iraq and Jordan. He even served as gatekeeper to his own client regimes: most Soviet aid to the YAR until the

[424] Ferris 2008, 25.
[425] Vatikiotis, "The Soviet Union and Egypt," 126-7.

Egyptian withdrawal was directly negotiated and approved by Nasser, not by YAR officials.[426] In recognition of Nasser's importance to Soviet foreign policy, nearly one quarter of all Soviet foreign aid in this period went to the UAR.[427]

Establishing a firmer presence in Yemen was also seen as strategically beneficial. Soviet officials believed that Yemen could be "a staging ground for Soviet expansion into the Arabian Peninsula at the expense of Western interests."[428] According to a U.S. intelligence assessment at the time, access to the British colony of Aden in the south and to Saudi Arabia, as well as the possibility of dominating the entrance to the Red Sea and of establishing a naval base near the Horn of Africa, made Yemen strategically appealing to the Soviets.[429] The Soviet Union prioritized naval bases in the area because they would provide unfettered access to the Indian Ocean: Soviet diplomat Oleg Peresypkin noted that "we need to have friendly relations with the littoral states" surrounding the Indian Ocean to facilitate Soviet ships' passage from Odessa to the Far East.[430] Additionally, the United States deployed the nuclear submarines *Poseidon* and *Polaris* in the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean in 1962; naval bases in the region could help the USSR to counter this threat.[431]

Outbreak of War: 1962-64

Many Soviet and UAR official government records are inaccessible to western researchers, making it difficult to establish the precise nature of the Soviet commitment to the

[426] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 72.
[427] Ferris 2008, 30.
[428] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 16.
[429] Memo (Thomas L. Hughes) State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, June 7, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Box 208a, Folder: Yemen General, 6/63, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (JFK).
[430] Quoted in Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 114.
[431] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 115.

UAR's intervention in Yemen.[432] However, historians of the civil war have concluded that the UAR would not have had the capacity to rapidly project force into Yemen without Soviet logistical support. As historian Asher Orkaby put it, at the beginning of the intervention, Soviet officials essentially gave "Nasser a blank check in their support of the YAR."[433] The evidence pointing to the USSR's swift and extensive military support for the intervention in Yemen suggests that Soviet support made the intervention possible.

The USSR was the first non-Arab state to recognize the new YAR regime on October 1, within 96 hours of the coup. Within a week of the coup (and potentially earlier), the USSR cooperated closely with the UAR to create an air bridge between the UAR and Yemen, providing long-range transport aircraft that were able to rapidly troops, weapons, and other supplies to the battlefield at a time when the survival of the new regime was tenuous. The air bridge was critical to the UAR's ability to rapidly deploy troops to Yemen because the alternative, transportation by sea, took four days on average in addition to a dangerous drive from the port to Sana'a. Furthermore, the Egyptian air force's main aircraft, the twin engine Il-14, would have required multiple refueling stops on the trip from the UAR to Yemeni territory; in contrast, the Soviet four-engine Antonov AN-12 had a range of 3,400 kilometers and could make almost the entire roundtrip without refueling. [434] According to Khrushchev's memoirs, the USSR provided several military transport aircraft for the intervention, as well as crews to support them, since UAR crews were not yet sufficiently trained to fly the AN-12s.[435]

[432] Jesse Ferris, "Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen, 1962-1963, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4, Fall 2008, 31.
[433] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 51.
[434] Ferris, *Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen,* 14-5.
[435] Ferris, *Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen,* 16.

Soviet officials also moved quickly to make the "even bolder decision" to allow USSR pilots to participate directly in combat in Yemen.[436] When the war broke out, Soviet Tupolev TU-16 twin-jet strategic heavy bombers had recently been introduced into the UAR air force, but UAR pilots were still training on these aircraft and unable to fly missions on their own. The TU-16 had a range of 4,800 kilometers, which meant it could make the round trip from Cairo to nearly any point in Yemen. The UAR's Il-28 bombers would have had to be based near Sana'a, but there was no suitable airfield in Yemen that could support high-tempo operations.

These bombing sorties often targeted supply convoys from Saudi Arabia or arms depots in Saudi Arabia itself; these missions therefore involved the considerable risk of "invoking the U.S. defense pledge to [Saudi Arabia], leading to a potential military clash between Soviet and American soldiers.[437] The Soviet decision to provide pilots occurred during the Cuban Missile crisis, no less: flights likely began in late October/early November.[438] Although the transport missions were flown likely exclusively by Soviet pilots, all Soviet air operations in Yemen fell directly under UAR command.[439] The air bridge was eventually converted into a routine supply route, which the Egyptian military remained dependent on since it was the only reliable way to transport perishables into Yemen and evacuate wounded troops. The UAR relied on the Soviet air bridge until 1965, when the UAR air force was finally able to take over.[440] In the meantime,

[436] Ferris, *Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen,* 21.
[437] There is no "smoking gun" evidence that Soviet pilots flew bombing missions that targeted Saudi Arabian territory, but historian Jesse Ferris believes that the evidence suggests that it is very likely that they did; see Ferris, *Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen, 22.*
[438] Ferris, *Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen,* 23.
[439] Ferris, *Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen,* 32.
[440] Ferris, *Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen,* 31.

the Soviet Union also provided 500 personnel to rapidly construct an airport suitable for jet aircraft in al-Rabah, completed in September 1963.[441]

In addition to providing critical support, the USSR also provided a great deal of financial support for the Egyptian intervention. The USSR and UAR reached an agreement at the beginning of the war that the USSR would replace all of the UAR military equipment used in Yemen.[442] This large-scale commitment "transferred to the Soviet Union a substantial portion of the added financial burden associated with maintaining the Egyptian army in the field."[443] By 1963, the USSR had sent about 900 technicians to Yemen to support Egyptian-Yemeni military operations.[444]

Inter-Arab Thaw (1964-early 66)

When Khrushchev was ousted from Soviet leadership in October 1964, Nasser worried that this would mean a shift in Soviet policy away from support for Third World states. While the USSR continued to treat the UAR as the keystone of its MENA policy, post-Khrushchev Soviet leadership became less patient with Nasser's disregard for their policy preferences.[445] Soviet officials were able to exploit the UAR's increased dependence on Soviet aid, which was due to Nasser's rupture with the United States and to the costs of the Yemen war itself. According to UAR Vice President Anwar Sadat's recollections of 1965, "In the same year Johnson cut off American aid to Egypt, and placed us in a critical position….we found no option

[441] Research Memorandum RNA-31, from George C. Denney, Jr., State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, "Subject: Soviet Airport Project in Yemen," June 28, 1963, National Security Files, Robert W. Komer Files, Folder: Yemen 4/1/63-11/30/63 [3 of 3], LBJ Library.
[442] Ferris, *Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen,* 33.
[443] Ferris, *Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen,* 35.
[444] Memo (Thomas L. Hughes), State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, "Subject: Soviet Presence in Yemen," June 7, 1963, National Security Files, Country Files—Yemen, Folder: Yemen General, 6/63, JFK Library.
[445] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 142.

but to resort to the Soviet Union."[446] However, the Soviet Union was increasingly willing to use its leverage to coerce Nasser into concessions to the Soviet military: most notably, after refusing to compromise for some time in the name of Egyptian sovereignty, Nasser eventually agreed to permit three to six USSR naval visits to coveted Egyptian ports in 1965.[447]

During the Inter-Arab Thaw, Nasser negotiated directly with King Faisal to seek an end to the civil war in Yemen and therefore to the UAR intervention (see above). The decline in U.S. aid to the UAR pushed Nasser closer to the Soviet Union and made the UAR increasingly dependent on Soviet aid in order to sustain the intervention. While the USSR did not directly pressure Nasser to withdraw from Yemen, Soviet officials did use their increased leverage to gain access to UAR ports and other concessions. Nasser resented what he viewed as infringements on Egyptian sovereignty by the Soviets. He was therefore further motivated to seek peace in Yemen, since ending the UAR intervention there would lift a significant financial burden and lessen UAR dependence on Soviet assistance.

Arab Cold War Resumes (Late 1965/early 1966-1967)

As described above, in late 1965/early 1966, Nasser turned away from the policy of reconciliation he had been pursuing with Saudi Arabia and launched a renewed offensive in Yemen. Nearly coinciding with the resumption of U.S. aid a few months later, Soviet officials presented Nasser with a "massive military aid package in which the Soviets offered to underwrite" the ongoing intervention in Yemen and to write off $400 million in debt that the UAR had accumulated for the purchase of military equipment.[448]

[446] Quoted in Ferris 2012, 152-3.
[447] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 158.
[448] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 115.

According to Orkaby, "The Soviet Foreign Office understood that increasing the military aid and debt ceiling for Nasser would encourage him to maintain a military presence in Yemen," but hoped that the infusion of aid would help to secure Soviet access to Yemeni port and air facilities and redirect Nasser away from a potential confrontation with Israel.[449] Because Soviet military and financial aid provided in the second half of 1965 essentially underwrote the UAR's Yemen intervention in the midst of an economic crisis for the UAR, "the Kremlin's attitude almost certainly contributed to the decision to hunker down for the long haul" in Yemen.[450] Soviet policy in early 1966 "weakened Egyptian resolve to liquidate the problem of Yemen. The dramatic act of debt forgiveness in Moscow…cannot have strengthened Nasser's resolve" to negotiate with Saudi Arabia.[451] Alongside the resumption of U.S. aid, the infusion of Soviet aid without a *quid pro quo* allowed Nasser to reinvigorate the UAR's Yemen intervention.

Alternative Explanation 1: Sectarianism/Ideology

Political ideological orientations clearly played a role in the intervention decision, as Nasser's revolutionary ideology and his pan-Arab aspirations, as well as status quo states' opposition to it, helped define the contours of regional contestation. The Yemeni coup's self-identification with the Free Officers movement encouraged the UAR (and Saudi Arabia, as well as other conservative monarchies in the region like Jordan) to view the civil war in Yemen through the lens of regional conflict.

However, the UAR had a more complicated relationship with the Yemeni Imamate prior to the coup than a straight-forward ideological explanation for intervention would suggest. In 1958, just a few years before the coup, Imam Ahmad affiliated the Yemeni Imamate with the

[449] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 119
[450] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 258.
[451] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble,* 257-8.

United Arab States (UAS), making the Imamate a kind of junior partner to the UAR. The Imamate also established trade and diplomatic relations with China and other communist states, and received an arms shipment from the Soviet Union in 1956.[452] According to Ferris, "Nasser's friendly relations with Ahmad's chosen successor, Crown Prince Muhammed al-Badr, seemed to indicate that differences between the two states arose out of specific policies, not a fundamental contradiction between two systems of government."[453] The motivations on both sides for the Imamate's accession to the UAS were self-evidently not ideological: Imam Ahmad's goal appeared to be to bandwagon with the UAR and its rising regional status. Likewise, Nasser's acceptance of a status quo monarchy into the UAS was likely driven by a desire to generate momentum behind his pan-Arab political entity rather than an ideological affinity.[454]

The relationship between Nasser and Imam Ahmad did sour after Syrian withdrawal from the UAR, and the Imam published a poem bashing socialism widely seen as an indirect attack on Nasser. In retaliation, Egypt withdrew from the nominal political union in 1961.[455] The UAR also began to provide support to the Yemeni Free Movement in Egypt, including providing the movement with access to Cairo's public propaganda channels, even though they had been forbidden from publicly criticizing the Imam prior to 1961.[456] Thus, ideological affinity does not entirely explain the more complex nature of the relationship between the UAR, the Imamate, and its domestic rivals, nor how these relationships shifted over time. Additionally, this explanation does not help us to understand how Nasser's willingness to remain involved in the Yemen intervention shifted over time between 1962 and 1967.

[452] Gause, *Saudi-Yemeni Relations*, 59.
[453] Ferris, Nasser's Gamble, 33.
[454] Ibid.
[455] James, Nasser at War, 56.
[456] Gause, *Saudi-Yemeni Relations*, 57.

Alternative Explanation 2: Domestic Politics

Domestic veto player dynamics also played a significant but not definitive in the UAR's decision to intervene. The UAR intervention decision, according to Haykal, was made after a three-day debate within the Egyptian leadership immediately following the coup. One group, led by Anwar Sadat, called for direct intervention; according to Nasser aide Sami Sharaf, the supporters of the intervention were concerned that the future of the Arab movement hung in the balance. Another faction called for indirect intervention, through the provision of arms and training to the new Yemeni regime. However, the option of providing indirect aid was seen as carrying a greater risk that the revolution would fail. Nasser's decision to intervene directly suggests a willingness on Nasser's behalf to accept greater costs to mitigate this risk.[457]

According to Ferris, the Egyptian military's eagerness to intervene also played a role.[458] However, there were also factors pushing against intervention, including the risk entailed in making a potentially endless commitment to keep a substantial number of Egyptian forces in a far-away country that few Egyptians cared about or understood, and the potential to damage the UAR's relationship with the United States, which was beginning to improve under the Kennedy administration.[459] According to Nasser biographer Laura James, "In the end, however, the army's eagerness to intervene was merely positive reinforcement, pushing the President in the direction he wanted to go."[460] Amin Howeidy, a leader of the Free Officers Movement who later became Defense Minister, notes that the decision to intervene was ultimately made by Nasser: "Amer didn't object. Sadat was enthusiastic. But the decision was taken by Nasser."[461]

[457] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 54.
[458] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, Chapter 1.
[459] Robert Stephens, *Nasser: A Political Biography* (New York: Allen Lane, 1971), 393.
[460] James, *Nasser at War*, 61.
[461] Quoted in Ibid.

Thus although other domestic political factors affected the initial intervention decision, the intervention decision was driven in large part by the logic of status anxiety—specifically, by Nasser's perception that the UAR had recently experienced significant losses in terms of its regional status, and that losing the Yemen civil war would constitute an additional loss.

Likewise, domestic political considerations appear to have played some role in variation in Nasser's willingness to sustain the intervention over time. Nasser may have been looking for a face-saving way out of Yemen during the détente period due to the high costs and number of casualties sustained by the UAR military as the intervention wore on without achieving its stated aims, as well as growing domestic opposition to the war. The UAR experienced relatively high numbers of battle casualties: estimates suggest that Egyptian troops sustained somewhere between 5,000 and 20,000 combat deaths over the course of the conflict.[462] The cost of the intervention is difficult to estimate in retrospect, but given the size of the intervention the costs were likely to have been quite high.[463] Finally, domestic opposition to the intervention grew in Egypt over the course of the war.[464] These factors likely contributed to Nasser' determination to find a way to withdraw from Yemen.

However, these factors do not explain why Nasser attempted to find a way to withdraw from January 1964, but then resumed fighting in early 1966. Furthermore, the cost of the intervention is directly related to the suspension of U.S. and Soviet aid in early 1964, and the resumption of aid over the summer of 1965 and early 1966. The UAR intervention was financially sustainable in the first stages of the war because the Soviet Union was reimbursing the UAR for much of the cost of fighting and directly supporting elements of the intervention, while U.S. food aid freed up government resources and therefore indirectly subsidized the

[462] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 194.
[463] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 195.
[464] Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble,* 206.

intervention. The combined weight of domestic economic factors and the costs of the intervention itself made the withdrawal of aid in 1964 critical to the UAR's ability to sustain the intervention. Likewise, it is difficult to see how the UAR could have sustained the fighting through 1966 and 1967, given that the roots of the domestic economic issues had not been addressed, without the resumption of aid.

Conclusion

This case study demonstrates that my theoretical explanations are the most satisfying explanations for Egypt's intervention in Yemen from 1962 through 1967. Nasser's Egypt was affected by status anxiety because Nasser believed that he had experienced a significant loss in terms of his regional status when Syria seceded from the United Arab Republic. He and the senior officials around him saw intervention in Yemen in 196 as a way to shore up further losses to his status in the region by preventing the royalists from ousting the new Free Officers-inspired regime in Yemen. Nasser feared that the fall of the new regime would constitute a loss for his regional movement and therefore Egypt's status, which could in turn endanger his regime domestically.

Additionally, Egypt's relationship with both the Soviet Union and the United States, and the military capacity provided by these relationships, helps explain Egypt's ability to intervene in Yemen. At the beginning of the war, the Soviet Union provided logistical military support that enabled the intervention. Meanwhile, the United States declined to exert the leverage that it did possess over Egypt to push back against the intervention, judging the possibility of a better relationship with Nasser to be more important than Egypt's intervention in Yemen. However, as changes in administration in both the Soviet Union and the United States brought greater

willingness to exert leverage to push back against the intervention, Nasser's behavior changed. In response to this pressure, he redeployed Egyptian troops within Yemen and began to actively negotiate a political settlement with Saudi Arabia. It was only after both the Soviet Union and the United States resumed their support for Egypt, including large arms sales packages and debt forgiveness, that Egypt doubled down in Yemen. Egypt was forced to withdraw from Yemen due to the massive blow to its capacity to intervene caused by the 1967 war.

Neither alternative provides a satisfying explanation for Egypt's intervention in Yemen. While ideology does help to explain why Nasser felt compelled to support the new Yemeni regime, his opposition to the Imamate is not as clear in light of their relationship prior to the Yemeni coup. While the Egyptian military's eagerness to intervene may have facilitated the intervention, contemporary accounts make it clear that Nasser had the ultimate decision-making authority. Furthermore, these alternatives do not explain variation in Egypt's intervention behavior over the course of the conflict until it was forced to withdraw in 1967.

Case Study 2: Yemen Civil War, 2015-2018

Under the Sisi regime that came to power in a July 2013 coup that unseated the recently elected Muslim Brotherhood president Mohammed Morsi, Egypt joined the Saudi-led intervening coalition. At first glance the fact that Sisi's Egypt, which receives a great deal of financial and political support from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait and shares regional strategic interests with these states, would join the coalition seems natural. However, while Egypt did nominally join the coalition, its role remained minimal. While Egypt "seemed to many in the Gulf the obvious source of effective ground forces…Cairo deflected requests about

entering the Yemen war."[465] Eventually Egypt agreed to contribute 800 ground troops and deployed naval vessels to assist the coalition by patrolling the Bab al-Mandab.[466]

Upon further reflection on Egypt's domestic problems and foreign policy, Sisi's reluctance to engage in Yemen makes considerable sense. In contrast with his Arab Gulf patrons, Sisi sees the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) party as well as the Sinai-based insurgent terrorist group Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis as his most important domestic challenge. Because he views all flavors of Islamists and jihadists, from the MB to ISIS, as connected, he sees regional struggles not on sectarian terms or in terms of countering Iran's influence, but rather as a regional struggle between Islamists and their backers, including Qatar and Turkey, who are therefore dangerous adversaries of Egypt, and non-Islamists.[467] In a speech before the UN General Assembly in September 2014, Sisi defined Islamist extremism as the most critical threat to regional security.[468] Unlike the Arab Gulf states, Egypt under Sisi "does not see itself as party to the sectarian conflicts ravaging the Levant."[469]

Because of Sisi's assessment of his domestic challenges and his foreign policy orientation, Egypt has been more cautious than the Gulf states when it comes to regional intervention in Syria, Libya, and elsewhere. In Libya, for example, Sisi said in a Newshour interview that "Egypt is one member of the coalition. It has been very clear since the onset of the coalition that the Egyptian role is confined now in fighting terrorism in Sinai and on the borders with Libya that extends over 1,200 kilometers."[470] Likewise, Sisi has spoken cautiously about the intervention in Yemen, and declined to participate to the extent that his Gulf patrons

[465] Lynch, *The New Arab Wars*, 239.
[466] *Reuters,* "Egypt Voices Concern Over Red Sea Security After Houthi Attack," August 13, 2018.
[467] Gamal Hassan, "A Revolution without a Revolutionary Foreign Policy," *Adelphi Series* Vol. 55, No. 453-454 (2015): 151-176; 168-9.
[468] *Dot Masr* (Arabic), "Complete Text of Sisi's Speech before the United Nations" September 24, 2014.
[469] Hassan, "A Revolution without a Revolutionary Foreign Policy," 169.
[470] *PBS News Hour*, "Transcript: Egypt's President on Fighting Islamic State, U.S. Relations," September 28, 2015.

requested.[471] Additionally, the Saudi-led intervention does not comport with Sisi's regional outlook—in fact, the coalition is fighting on the same side as the Yemeni MMB-affiliated Islah Party, a no-go for Sisi. Why then did Egypt participate in the intervention in Yemen?

I argue that following the coup that brought him to power and due to his over-reliance on the economic and political support of his Gulf patrons, Sisi experienced 2014 through 2015 as a loss in terms of Egypt's regional status. Declining to participate in the intervention altogether would have caused a greater threat to his regional status because it could have led to retaliation by the Gulf states and the loss of critical foreign aid grants and investments in the Egyptian economy. Additionally, Egypt did not experience any pushback from its major great power patron, the United States, for its participation. In fact, the Obama administration lifted a temporary freeze on military sales to Egypt less than a week after the Saudi-led intervention began. The United States therefore declined to exert the leverage that it did have to prevent Egyptian participation, either directly or via its Gulf state security partners which in turn also had significant leverage over Egypt.

Much like Qatar,[472] therefore, Egypt participated in the Saudi-led coalition not because the Houthis posed a security threat from Sisi's perspective, but rather because declining to provide even token contributions would have risked further loss of regional status in terms of Egypt's relationship with Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Hypothesis 1: Status Anxiety

Egypt's relationship with Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf states has undergone a radical transformation since days of competition between Nasser and Faisal. Beginning with president

[471] See more about this below.
[472] See chapter 8.

Anwar Sadat, Egypt's foreign policy began to take a more pro-western tilt, particularly after the 1979 Camp David Agreements. Egypt's relationship with the Arab Gulf states also became a greater priority following the 1973 oil embargo, when the wealth of Arab Gulf states began to skyrocket and interest in attracting Gulf wealth grew. The Gulf states temporarily broke ties with Egypt in 1979 after the Camp David Accord, but these relationships had been fully restored by 1987, following the Iranian Revolution and the growing threat that Iran appeared to pose to Gulf states. Egypt's security relationship with the GCC was significantly enhanced during the first Gulf War, when Egypt provided troops to the coalition that liberated Kuwait; in return, the GCC states forgave $7 billion in outstanding Egyptian debt. Egypt's economic ties to the Gulf have also expanded dramatically since the first Gulf War: Saudi imports and exports to Egypt increased tenfold between 1991 and 2001.

Saudi Arabian and Emirati leadership were troubled by the fall of Egyptian president Mubarak in 2011 during the Arab Spring and by the rising political fortunes of the Egyptian MB, whose calls for elections and accountability to domestic populations were anathema to these leaders. With the largest population in the Arab world, Egypt is viewed by the GCC states as critical to constructing an effective Sunni coalition to counter Iran.[473]

Although he emerged successfully from the July 2013 coup, Sisi's regime could have been far more precarious were it not for the massive influx of support he received from the Arab Gulf states. Within 24 hours of the coup, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait pledged about $12 billion in financial assistance and energy supplies. Without this immediate assistance, "Egypt would have been forced to declare insolvency within months, given that its currency reserves had fallen from $35 billion at the end of 2010 to around $15 billion in June 2013."[474] The Gulf states

[473] Rutherford and Sowers, *Modern Egypt*, 163-6.
[474] Roll, "Managing Change," 33.

continued to provide significant assistance in the lead-up to and throughout the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen. Between June 2013 and 2015, the three Gulf states provided Egypt with more than $29 billion in cash deposits to the central bank as well as oil shipments and investments. Additionally, King Salman visited Egypt in April 2016, reportedly leading to an additional 36 agreements worth a total of $25 billion, including a Saudi investment fund valued at $16 billion, the creation of a free trade zone between Sinai and Saudi and a bridge connecting Sinai and Saudi, and oil products at concessionary rates through 2021. Egypt's growing dependence on Saudi and Emirati economic support since 2013 has even drawn criticism that Egypt has become subservient to the Gulf states. This criticism was heightened in 2016, when Egypt transferred sovereignty over Sanafir and Tiran, two small islands, to Saudi Arabia while Saudi King Salman was on an official visit to Cairo. The announcement coincided with a new foreign aid package from Saudi Arabia and drew considerable public protest.[475]

The support provided by the Arab Gulf states was critical for the Egyptian regime's position domestically and in the region, both because of Egypt's crumbling economy and because of the military's role in the Egyptian economy.[476] Since the start of the Arab Spring, Egypt's tourism industry, which at one time made up more than 10% of the national economy, was decimated. Much of Egypt's industrial sector is based on energy extraction and production, which fluctuates with global oil prices. More than a quarter of the national budget is spent on salaries for the bloated civil service, while an additional 30% goes towards subsidies and 25% covers interest on loans. When the government allowed the Egyptian pound to float in November 2017, it promptly lost more than half of its value.[477] Because of the state of the economy, Egypt

[475] Bruce K. Rutherford and Jeannie Sowers, *Modern Egypt: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 167.
[476] Hassan, "A Revolution without a Revolutionary Foreign Policy," 173.
[477] Peter Hessler, "Egypt's Failed Revolution," *The New Yorker,* December 25, 2016.

depends quite substantially on foreign aid. Aid allows the government to stave off difficult decisions around reforming the economy. According to Rutherford and Sowers, "For economic reasons, Egypt's policymakers must preserve good relations with the Arab Persian Gulf states, Europe, and the United States as its primary trade and investment partners."[478]

The Egyptian military is the keystone of Sisi's regime and critical for his domestic support. While the Egyptian military has played an important role in the Egyptian economy for decades, its role expanded considerably under Sisi. According to Rutherford, "the military's economic empire includes companies involved in construction, agriculture, fertilizer, food production, steel, cement, security services, land reclamation, oil services, tourism, armaments, and ammunition." Military-owned companies are tax and tariff-exempt, and the military is involved in a number of giant infrastructure projects, including the construction of the new administrative capital east of Cairo.[479] Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states have not just provided substantial economic assistance to the government of Egypt, but have provided considerable investments in the military. For example, a March 2015 op-ed in al-Arabiya, a media company associated with the Saudi state, urged that "The army is one of the best institutions in Egypt as it is the most efficient and disciplined, and it can be a partner in giant developmental projects but via its executive role, not through its political or military role."[480]

A scandal known as "SisiLeaks" in early 2015, just before the intervention in Yemen began, highlighted the extent to which the regime relied on funding from the Gulf. On recordings that were linked to the media, Sisi is heard telling his office director, Abbas Kamel, and military council member Mahmoud Hijazi to seek funds from Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait: "Look,

[478] Rutherford and Sowers, *Modern Egypt*, 144.
[479] Bruce K. Rutherford, "Egypt's New Authoritarianism under Sisi," *The Middle East Journal* Vol. 72, No. 2 (2018): 185-208, 190-1.
[480] Abdulrahman al-Rashed, "Gulf-Egyptian Military and Economic Cooperation," *Al-Arabiya*, March 4, 2015.

tell [Saudi leaders] we need 10 [billion dollars] in the army's account, and that those 10, as soon as [Sisi] wins [the election], will be put to use for the state. We want 10 from the UAE and 10 from Kuwait as well, in addition to some money to be deposited in the central bank."[481]

In this context, even minor rhetorical pushback from the Egyptian regime about the Saudi-led coalition intervention in Yemen drew immediate rebukes from Gulf leaders. During an April 2015 Arab League summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, president Sisi read out excerpts from a letter from Russian President Vladimir Putin that criticized the Saudi-led airstrikes in Yemen and called for "the resolution of all the problems the Arab world faces through peaceful means, without any external interference".[482] The move drew an immediate rebuke from Saudi leadership.[483] It also drew public rebuke from Saudi-affiliated media sources: the Saudi journalist Abd al-Rahman al-Rashed noted that "Egypt is big but it should remember that it needs regional friends."[484]

In addition to the token Egyptian participation in the Saudi-led coalition, Egyptian leadership took other steps to mend the relationship with its Gulf patrons. As reported by state-affiliated media source al-Ahram, the presidential statement that followed Sisi's meeting with the Saudi foreign minister soon after spoke of the "consensus" between the two states on regional questions, including intervention in Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere, and stressed "Egypt's concern for the security of the Arab Gulf region which is an inseparable part of Egyptian national security upon which Egypt will accept no infringement." It also reported that Saudi Arabia had placed additional pressure on Egypt to "reconcile with the Muslim Brotherhood in the context of a shift

[481] *Al-Arabi Al-Jadeed*, "Sisi Mole Leaks President's Demands for Gulf Cash," February 9, 2015.
[482] Mahmoon Alabbasi, "Signs of Unease Surface in Egyptian-Saudi Ties," *Middle East Eye*, April 1, 2015; Also see: *Arabi-21*, "Alam Al-Sisi yehajim alsaudia bi shada wa tabadl lilrdood," March 31, 2015.
[483] Yara Bayoumy and Mahmoud Mourad, "Putin Letter to Arab Summit Triggers Strong Saudi Attack," *Reuters*, March 29, 2015.
[484] Lynch, *The New Arab Wars*, 239.

in Saudi foreign policy since King Salman assumed power in favour of a Saudi-Qatari-Turkish axis at the expense of weight that Riyadh had accorded to its relations with Egypt during the reign of King Abdullah."[485]

Egyptian leaders' subsequent public statements about the Yemen intervention strikingly framed Egypt's participation in terms of Egypt's relations with the Gulf states, rather than around security concerns or countering Iran. Egyptian foreign minister Sameh Shoukry told a meeting of Arab foreign ministers in 2018 that "Egypt has declared its political and military support, its participation with the coalition with an aerial and naval Egyptian force, as well as a ground force if necessary, in light of Egypt's historic and unshakeable responsibility towards Arab and Gulf national security."[486]

Hypothesis 2: Great Power Relationships

The United States, Egypt's most important international security partner, possessed considerable leverage over the Sisi regime in the wake of the coup that it might have used to push back against Egyptian participation in the coalition. Instead, however, not unlike in 1962, the Obama administration chose to continue aid to the Egyptian regime in hopes of securing its relationship with the new Egyptian regime.

The Obama administration's response to the new Sisi-led regime following the 2013 coup against the Morsi government was "ambivalent"—officials were torn between seeing Sisi regime as a strategic ally and an unreliable, repressive dictatorship that reversed the progress made during the Arab Spring.[487] According to a senior State Department official, President Obama was "unhappy with" the coup, "which set a complicated precedent in a region still in the throes of

[485] Medhat Al-Zahed, "Cairo-Riyadh Divergence," *Al-Ahram Weekly,* n.d.
[486] *Egypt Today,* "Into Egypt's Role in the Yemeni Crisis," August 13, 2018.
[487] Hassan, "A Revolution without a Revolutionary Foreign Policy," 166.

revolts of various stripes and guaranteed even greater polarization in Egyptian society and even greater civilian strife. He was also mindful, however, of the mood of the Egyptian public, our continuing reliance on security partnership with Egypt, and the value of retaining some leverage over Sisi and a post-revolutionary transition that seemed unending."[488]

A deadly military crackdown in August 2013, one of "most bloody incidents of mass unlawful killings of largely peaceful protestors in recent history," according to Human Rights Watch, killed more than 1,000 protestors.[489] In response, the Obama administration cancelled a joint biannual military exercise, *Operation Bright Star*, and placed a temporary freeze on a military aid package to Egypt that included $260 million in funding as well as F-16s, M1-A1 tank parts, Harpoon missiles, and Apache attack helicopters.[490] This move suggested that the United States was insisting that its relationship with Egypt "now hinged on the Egyptian regime's record on democratization and human rights," a stark contrast to the US-Egypt relationship from the since the Camp David Accords, which rested on shared strategic interests.[491] However, the administration quickly reversed course. The FY 2014 appropriations bill exempted Egypt from an immediate suspension of military aid that typically follows a coup.[492] On March 31, 2015, just a week after the intervention in Yemen began, President Obama announced after a call with Sisi that the United States would release the freeze on military aid.[493] Additionally, in August the "Strategic Dialogue" between Cairo and Washington was resuscitated after a five-year hiatus. In addition to Egypt's strategic importance, pressure

[488] William J. Burns, *The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for its Renewal* (New York: Random House, 2019), 308.
[489] Roll, "Managing Change," 33.
[490] *The Atlantic Council,* "One Year On: Foreign Policy Under Sisi," n.d. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/?id=24610:one-year-on-foreign-policy-under-sisi (accessed May 3, 2019).
[491] Hassan, "A Revolution without a Revolutionary Foreign Policy," 166.
[492] *The Atlantic Council,* "One Year On: Foreign Policy Under Sisi."
[493] The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Readout of the President's Call with President al-Sisi of Egypt," March 31, 2015.

from regional allies, including the Gulf states and Israel, contributed to the Obama administration's reversal of its initial position towards the Sisi regime.[494] Finally, not unlike Nasser in the 1950's and 60's, Sisi signaled to the United States that the west that it was willing to turn to Russia in the absence of other strategic alternatives. Russia's foreign and defense ministers visited Cairo in November 2013, the first time a bilateral meeting of this sort had occurred since the 1970s. Sisi subsequently visited Moscow as the head of a delegation including the Egyptian foreign minister and military leadership in February 2014 that was intended to facilitate an arms deal that was reportedly worth $3.5 billion.[495]

U.S. annual aid to Egypt, at about $1.3 billion, was substantially smaller than the total amount of Gulf aid, at some $20 billion annually since 2013. The United States could therefore also exercise leverage over Egypt via its Gulf state security partners.[496] However, as we have seen in previous chapters, the Obama administration declined to exercise such leverage to push back against the Saudi-led coalition's intervention.

Finally, Egypt is not constrained in participating in the intervention by a lack of military capacity. Indeed, Egypt has the largest military in the Arab world, and military assistance in the form of weapons and training has ensured that Egypt is able to undertake joint military operations with other U.S. security partners in the region, including joint airstrikes in Libya against Libyan Islamist rebel militias in 2014 alongside the UAE.[497] This military capacity is due almost entirely to U.S.-provided military assistance over the past three decades or so. U.S.

[494] Hassan, "A Revolution without a Revolutionary Foreign Policy," 167.
[495] Hassan, "A Revolution without a Revolutionary Foreign Policy," 168.
[496] Shana Marshall, *The Egyptian Armed Forces and the Remaking of an Economic Empire*, Vol. 15 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015), 4.
[497] Rutherford and Sowers, *Modern Egypt,* 166.

military assistance "States provides steady and substantial military assistance that has created one of the best-equipped militaries in the Arab world."[498]

Alternative Explanation 1: Sectarianism/Ideology

Although Egypt is a majority Sunni country, sectarian motive do not appear to be at the forefront of the decision to participate in the intervening coalition. According to Hassan, "Egypt does not see itself as party to the sectarian conflicts ravaging the Levant, and does not view the Iranian threat in sectarian terms—Shias are a negligible minority in Egypt—but from the perspective of the balance of power."[499] While the Arab Gulf states may view Egypt as a critical member of a Sunni security alliance in the region, as noted above, Egyptian leadership tends to view Egyptian security in terms of Islamists vs. non-Islamists rather than in sectarian terms. While Egypt "has never approached regional problems and conflicts in the explicitly sectarian way that informs Saudi" policy, this leads to a dynamic where "financing from and tight strategic coordination with the Gulf may drag the Egyptians into Saudi Arabia's seemingly pathological and one-dimensional Sunni-versus-Shi'a view of the world."[500]

Egyptian leadership has expressed concern about Iran's role in the region and what they view as its links to radical Sunni groups that could threaten Egypt's security.[501] While this broader Islamist vs. non-Islamist foreign policy framework is explicitly ideological, it does not explain why Egypt would participate in an intervention on the same side as the Yemeni MB-affiliated Islah party as well as a number of Salafi militias that receive direct support from Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

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[498] Rutherford and Sowers, *Modern Egypt*, 146.
[499] Hassan, "A Revolution without a Revolutionary Foreign Policy," 169.
[500] Steven A. Cook, "Egypt and the Gulf: When a Free Lunch Is Not Free," *Council on Foreign Relations Blog*, May 13, 2014.
[501] Rutherford and Sowers, *Modern Egypt*, 169.

Alternative Explanation 2: Domestic Politics

As noted above, domestic political arrangements did play a role in the decision to participate in the intervention, since the military regime relies so heavily and directly on funding and support from the Gulf countries. However, I argue that this effect is better explained by my status anxiety Hypothesis than it is by focusing solely on Egyptian domestic political institutions and politics.

While Sisi's regime must be cognizant of public opinion as any authoritarian regime must, the military regime has engaged in widespread, violent repression in a way that has made it almost impossible for Egyptians to express meaningful dissent from the regime's decisions. Following the coup, the Egyptian people "experienced a new dimension" in repression at the hands of the state: "while until the 2013 coup, "state violence had been used rather erratically, after the coup the security forces cracked down systematically on every sign of resistance, opposition or criticism, especially but by no means only from members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The imprisonment of tens of thousands of individuals for political reasons severely weakened the organizational structure of the Brotherhood and intimidated Islamist and non-Islamist protestors alike."[502] Furthermore, the regime goes to considerable lengths to actively shape public opinion in favor of its policies via direct ownership of some media outlets, censorship laws, and repression of critical media sources.[503] While the war in Yemen may not necessarily have been popular in Egypt, Sisi's approval ratings generally remained high, with many citizens believing that he had at least brought stability and turned away from the Islamist politics of the MB.[504] Considering that a 2016 Arab Barometer survey found that 84% of

[502] Roll, "Managing Change," 33.
[503] Rutherford and Sowers, *Modern Egypt,* 145.
[504] Hessler, "Egypt's Failed Revolution."

Egyptians wanted stronger relations with Saudi Arabia, the public was also likely to agree with the logic behind participating in the intervention, if not the war itself.[505]

Veto player explanations also do not explain why Egypt would participate in the Saudi-led coalition intervention. According to Lynch, "The calls for Egyptian participation in the Yemen war provoked an unusually sharp public divide in the Sisi-era political elite. While the military regime understood well the extent of its dependence on its UAE and Saudi backers, it faced considerable public skepticism about a military role in Yemen."[506]

Conclusion

The evidence above demonstrates that the status anxiety and great power relationship hypotheses together explain Egypt's otherwise puzzling decision to participate in the Saudi-led coalition's intervention in Yemen beginning in March 2015. The steep decline in the Egyptian economy and domestic instability beginning in 2011 was perceived by the Sisi military regime as a loss in regional status. Defying the Gulf states' wishes altogether by not participating in the intervention would have further threatened that status because the regime relied so heavily on Gulf funding, investment, and political support. The Sisi regime was able to square this circle by providing token amounts of support for the intervention while still expressing reservations about the policy utility of the intervention.

Furthermore, the regime as not impeded by its great power patron, the United States, attempting to exert leverage to prevent Egypt's participation in the intervention. While the Obama administration took some measures to temporarily freeze arms sales immediately following the coup as an expression of displeasure, the Obama administration's decision to lift

[505] Rutherford and Sowers, *Modern Egypt*, 145.
[506] Lynch, *The New Arab Wars,* 239.

the freeze and affirm the U.S.-Egypt security partnership less than a week after the Yemen intervention began, as well as the explicit U.S. support for Saudi Arabia and the UAE throughout the intervention, were clear signals that the U.S. administration was not interested in pressuring Egypt to decline to participate in the intervention.

Chapter 4: Iran

Case Study 1: North Yemen Civil War, 1962-67

Like the region's conservative Arab monarchies, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the shah of Iran who ruled Iran from September 1941 until the Iranian Revolution in February 1979, saw the rise of the Nasser-inspired pan-Arab nationalist movement as a threat. Nevertheless, he did not intervene in the civil war in Yemen in 1962, or at any time subsequently. What explains this contrast?

I argue that in contrast with significant domestic and international setbacks in the late 1950's through 1961, by 1962, the shah's regime was on an upswing that would continue throughout the 1960s and bring Iran to the status of most powerful state in the region. While domestic instability threatened to topple the shah in 1961, by 1962, his domestic position had become much more secure. An April 1962 state visit to the United States made the shah more optimistic about his relationship with the Kennedy administration, and also resulted in the promise of an extensive five-year arms package. In September 1962, just a week before the UAR intervention in Yemen began, the shah negotiated a détente with the Soviet Union that minimized the most important regional threat that Iran faced and undercut his domestic opponents, minimizing what he saw as the threat of domestic subversion. The détente negotiation was a multi-fold success for the shah, in that through it he gained greater regional status as well as significant concessions from the Soviets that paved the way for warming relations throughout the 1960's, all with the tacit approval of his most important security partner, the United States. In this chapter, I summarize the evidence that the shah believed he had suffered significant losses in terms of regional status in the late 1950s through 1961, but that these losses were more-than-

regained over the course of 1962, in the immediate lead-up to the civil war in Yemen which began in late September 1962.

Loss of Status, Late 1950's through 1961

In the late 1950s through 1961, the shah's regime suffered several losses in terms of regional status that the shah himself perceived as setbacks. As summarized by a January 1961 memo from the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, factors that contributed to the shah's loss of status during this period included domestic "inflation and other economic difficulties, the so-far unsuccessful land reform program, Soviet propaganda and subversive efforts, and the long deferral of free elections. In addition, the Shah is known to view the recent overthrow of the governments in Korea and Turkey with apprehension."[507] Four sources in particular contributed to the shah's perceived loss of regional status in this period: rhetorical conflict with and subversion instigated by the Soviet Union; the subordinate threat of Nasser's pan-Arab revolutionary movement; tensions with the incoming Kennedy administration; and domestic instability that led to the appointment of an adversarial prime minister.

The shah was a committed anti-communist as well as a stalwart client and security partner of the United States. According to historian Roham Alvindi, the shah "The shah was a committed anti-communist who saw the hidden hand of the Soviet Union behind every threat to his throne."[508] Iran shared an extensive border with the Soviet Union stretching from Central

[507] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Document 4, Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara, Washington, January 26, 1961. JCSM-27–61; SUBJECT: U.S. Courses of Action in Iran (U); For the Joint Chiefs of Staff: L. L. Lemnitzer, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

[508] Roham Alvandi, "The Shah's détente with Khrushchev: Iran's 1962 missile base pledge to the Soviet Union." *Cold War History* 14.3 (2014): 423-444, 425.

Asia to the Caucuses; as such, the Soviet Union's regional orientation hit close to home. As we have seen with other leaders in the region, the shah perceived his regime's stability to be directly linked to regional status competition. He was particularly concerned with the USSR both as a regional adversary and because the communist Tudeh Party, though officially outlawed a decade earlier, was one of the largest and most cohesive sources of domestic opposition to the shah's regime. The shah therefore particularly feared Soviet support for Iranian communists and other potential forms of Soviet subversion within Iran. According to Alvandi, the shah was known to reply to those who counselled restraint against the Soviets that "In two world wars we learned the fallacy of neutrality for a country so strategically located as Iran, for in neither case did it keep us from being overrun."[509]

The shah formally aligned Iran with the west—and implicitly in opposition to the Soviet Union—by joining the Baghdad Pact in 1955, hoping that this would encourage the Americans to increase the already-substantial flow of arms to Iran and deepen the United States' commitment to Iran's defense.[510] The shah traveled to Moscow in 1956 to meet with Khrushchev, but was not reassured. Instead, he "felt threatened by Khrushchev… [and] worried especially about the role Khrushchev played in the nonaligned movement and the effect of the Bandung Conference, held in Indonesia two months before his trip to the Soviet Union."[511] Nevertheless, the shah entered into negotiations with Soviet leadership in the late 1950's, hoping to sign a non-aggression treaty that would reduce tensions with the USSR. Instead, under a great deal of pressure from both the UK and the United States, the potential Soviet-Iranian détente collapsed in February 1959. Instead, Iran signed a bilateral Defense Agreement with the United

[509] Ibid.
[510] Ibid.
[511] Gholam Reza Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah* Oakland: University of California Press, 2009, 290.

States in March 1959.[512] In response, Soviet leadership launched an intense campaign of propaganda aimed at "actively inciting revolt and condemning [Prime Minister] Amini as a servant of the Shah and the United States."[513] The campaign featured hostile broadcasts on Radio Moscow in Farsi, as well as the sponsorship of the 'National Voice of Iran,' a vitriolic broadcast staffed by exiled Iranian communists and hosted in Soviet Azerbaijan.[514] On the day that the Defense Agreement was signed, "Khrushchev [publicly] called the shah a weakling who was afraid of his own people," and subsequently "an American lackey who was turning Iran into an American base."[515]

The shah shared a similar view of Nasser's pan-Arab revolutionary movement with other conservative monarchies in the region. Like the leadership of Saudi Arabia and Jordan, he was "especially threatened by the rise of Arab nationalism, whose Islamic component created domestic strife and also affected Iran's relations with the West."[516] Like the other conservative monarchs in the region, he viewed the wave of Nasser-inspired coups and protests across the region in the late 1950's as a threat to his own regional status. He was "devastated" by the 1958 Iraq coup "and disappointed by the seeming ineffectiveness of the Baghdad Pact to confront the new regime."[517] The shah's Iran had cordial relations with many of the monarchs of the MENA region, and was perturbed by Nasser's movement. However, the shah saw Nasser not necessarily as an autonomous threat, but rather as "a Soviet surrogate."[518] He viewed the Soviet Union as by far the most important threat to Iran's regional status, and Nasser's revolutionary movement

[512] Alvandi, "The Shah's Détente with Khrushchev," 426.
[513] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Document 90. Paper Prepared for the Iran Task Force, Washington, undated. STATUS REPORT—THE SITUATION IN IRAN, For Meeting of the Iran Task Force of August 2, 1961.
[514] Alvandi, "The Shah's Détente with Khrushchev," 426.
[515] Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*, 335.
[516] Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*, 289.
[517] Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*, 292.
[518] Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*, 335.

occupied comparatively little of his thought when it came to regional policy.[519] As a threat to Iran's regional status, Nasser's movement was therefore subordinate to the Soviet Union in the eyes of the shah.

The incoming Kennedy administration also appeared to the shah to threaten the status of his defense relationship with the United States. The United States had been involved in Iran's military affairs since the middle of World War II, when the United States began sending material and military advisers to Iran.[520] The relationship was key to Iran's regional status: "For Mohammad Reza Shah, the survival of the Pahlavi monarchy rested on the strength of the Iranian armed forces, backed by the economic and military support of the United States."[521] The U.S. military assistance was also critical to the regime's domestic survival since the Army was the primary base of support for the shah. As a result, he was "almost obsessed with increasing [the Army's] size and obtaining the most modern military equipment."[522]

From the American perspective, Iran was a critical regional partner due to its strategic location. According to Kennedy's Secretary of State Dean Rusk, "That whole Middle Eastern area could have collapsed like a stack of cards if Iran fell under hostile domination of another country, from the point of view of the United States. So we were not interested in a weak Iran."[523] Nevertheless, in line with the Kennedy administration's broader policy re-orientation towards the Third World, many in the administration expressed frustration with what struck them as the backwardness of the shah's regime and favored a U.S. policy that placed more pressure on

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[519] Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, *Answer to History* New York: Stein & Day Publishers, 1980, Chapter 10, "Foreign Policy," pp. 131-143.
[520] Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*, 287.
[521] Alvandi, "The Shah's Détente with Khrushchev," 425.
[522] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Document 27. Memorandum From the Vice Chairman of the Policy Planning Council (Morgan) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), Washington, March 27, 1961. SUBJECT: Iran.
[523] Interview with Dean Rusk, by William Burr, Athens, GA, May 23, 1986, Foundation for Iranian Studies, 17. Available at: https://fis-iran.org/en/content/rusk-dean.

the shah to instigate internal reform. Bob Komer, whose view of the shah set the tone for many others in the administration, said later that "One of the very first problems we had was Iran, because the Shah, who had returned after Mossadegh, was feeling much more uncertain in his country. There was a certain increase in pressures on him, though the pressures were mostly domestic rather than foreign. He was frustrated. He was complaining. It looked as though we were heading maybe for an overthrow, or an attempted revolution."[524] One of the Kennedy administration's first steps in the foreign policy realm was to appoint an Iran Task Force to reassess and revamp U.S. policy towards the shah. "Several members" of the Iran Task Force "had a history with Iran and were vociferously anti-shah."[525]

These moves caused the shah considerable consternation. A discussion at a March 1961 State Department-Joint Chiefs of Staff meeting noted that "that the Shah had been concerned that the new Administration might withdraw the support that had earlier been given to him by the U.S."[526] Likewise, the shah expressed deep concern that this shift in relations could affect the United States' military assistance to Iran, which the shah saw as the pillar of his regional status.[527]

Finally, alongside these setbacks to his regional status, the shah was dealing with increasing domestic instability in this time period that appeared to threaten his regime. On May 2, 1961, a teachers' strike brought up to 50,000 demonstrators into the streets. The army was brought in to curtail the demonstrations and in the ensuing clash a teacher was killed, giving the

[524] Interview with Robert Komer, by William Burr, Washington, DC, April 27, 1987, Foundation for Iranian Studies, 11. Available at: https://fis-iran.org/sites/fis/files/Robert-W-Komer-Vol-I.pdf.
[525] Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*, 215.
[526] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Document 29. Memorandum on the Substance of Discussion at the Department of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting, Washington, March 31, 1961, 11:30 a.m.
[527] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Document 11. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Jones) to Secretary of State Rusk, Washington, February 15, 1961. SUBJECT: Call by the Iranian Ambassador and the Shah's Informal Special Emissary on the President to Deliver a Letter from the Shah.

movement greater visibility and popularity. The shah was deeply worried by the demonstrations; the situation appeared so dire that he was reportedly "ready to flee the country" should they trigger the regime's downfall.[528] Likewise, the U.S. embassy in Iran concluded that should the demonstrations continue, "and should security forces refuse to fire in the event of need….[the regime] may be gravely threatened."[529]

As a result of the demonstrations, Prime Minister Jafar Sarif-Emami resigned. In a sop to his opposition, the shah appointed Ali Amini in his place. Amini had served as ambassador to the US, had established a friendship with then-Senator Kennedy; he was "an American favorite, which made him both an asset and a threat to the shah."[530] The shah, however, did not trust Amini and saw him as dangerously opportunistic and ambitious. The shah was also under pressure from U.S. officials to reconcile with Mossadeq's opposition party, the National Front. The shah saw his decision to appoint Amini, who had served in Mossadeq's cabinet prior to the 1953 coup, as "the lesser of two evils" compared to sharing power with the National Front, "but an evil nevertheless."[531] Amini's cabinet appointments included Nouraldin Alamouti, Minister of Justice, a member of an organization of Communist intellectuals called the Group of Fifty-Three, and Hassan Arsanjani, Minister of Agriculture, who "had been unrestrained in his criticism of the Shah…and a friend and accomplice of General Gharani, the mastermind of the failed 1958 coup."[532] The cabinet's tilt towards the nationalist/Mossadeq position reflected an apparent growing pro-nationalist sentiment amongst junior army officers and urban civilian populations.[533]

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[528] Abbas Milani, *The Shah* London: Macmillan, 2012, 252.
[529] Milani, *The Shah*, 251.
[530] Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*, 213.
[531] Milani, *The Shah*, 257.
[532] Milani, *The Shah*, 258.
[533] FRUS Doc 27.

Status Resurgent, 1962

However, beginning in 1962, the shah's domestic and regional position began to shift quite favorably. As a result, the shah's status anxiety had abated by the time that Nasser's intervention in Yemen began in late September 1962. The shah's feeling of domestic stability was bolstered by Amini's resignation in the summer of 1962, and his regional status was buoyed considerably by an official visit to the United States in April 1962 that yielded a large arms sale agreement, as well as a détente agreement negotiated with the Soviet Union in September 1962 that in the shah's view undercut both his regional and domestic Soviet-supported opponents. Over the course of the 1960's, the shah's regional position gained strength as his relationship with the Johnson administration improved, the relationship with the Soviets also grew friendlier, and the White Revolution grew Iran's economy and reshaped domestic political structures in a way that was favorable for the shah.

In April 1962, the shah made an official state visit to the United States that included meetings with the president and secretary of defense, a speech before Congress, as well as promises of military and economic aid and reassurances from U.S. officials of Iran's critical importance in U.S. plans of regional security. In one meeting, the president reassured the shah that "We are aware that the Shah is the keystone to the arch in Iran."[534] During their April 12th meeting, Secretary of Defense outlined a general plan for the shah which said that "the United States would be prepared to undertake a five-year program for the supply of necessary equipment, if Iran would agree to so reduce the size of its armed forces."[535] Throughout the day,

[534] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Document 246. Memorandum of Conversation. Washington, April 13, 1962, 11 a.m. SUBJECT: United States-Iran Relations PARTICIPANTS: The President, The Shah of Iran, Secretary of Defense, etc.

[535] U.S. officials "believed it would be wise to reduce manpower levels by about 25 percent;" Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Document 243. Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, April 12, 1962, 9:30 a.m. SUBJECT United States-Iran Relations PARTICIPANTS: The President, The Shah of Iran, etc.

the Secretary of Defense and the shah bargained over the terms of the agreement. They reached a written proposal by the end of the visit which stated that "the United States Government is prepared to make a firm undertaking to deliver military equipment to Iran over the period July 1, 1962 through June 30, 1967, in accordance with the attached Annex A to this aide-mémoire."[536] The promised military equipment included vehicles, communications equipment, small arms and ammunition, a number of aircraft including "2 Squadrons Jet Fighter-Bombers (13 aircraft per squadron)" and ground force construction projects. Additionally, U.S. officials promised to review their economic assistance to Iran with an eye toward expanding it, and to consider approaching the major U.S. oil companies about maximizing Iranian oi revenues through production allocations in the region.[537] The visit and resulting agreements helped reassure the shah of the Kennedy administration's support in spite of the rocky start to their relationship.

The relationship only grew closer over the course of the Yemen war, especially after the Johnson administration came into office. In 1964, when the shah formally met President Johnson for the first time as president, Johnson complimented the progress of the White Revolution and called Iran the brightest spot in the Middle East."[538]

In an about-face from the relationship of overt hostility between Iran and the Soviet Union, the shah also managed to negotiate a détente agreement with the USSR in September 1962. The negotiations were facilitated by the resignation of the staunchly anti-Soviet Prime

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[536] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Document 244. Memorandum of Conversation Washington, April 12, 1962. SUBJECT: United States-Iran Relations PARTICIPANTS: The Shah of Iran Major Gen. Khatami, Commander, Imperial Iranian Air Force; Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Document 248. Aide-Mémoire Presented by Secretary of State Rusk to the Shah of Iran, Washington, April 13, 1962. Brig. Gen. Afkhami, J–5, Imperial Iranian Supreme Commander's Staff, Honorable Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, etc.
[537] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Document 252. Memorandum From the Department of State Executive Secretary (Battle) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy). Washington, April 18, 1962. SUBJECT: Iran: Followup [sic] on Visit of Shah of Iran.
[538] Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*, 299.

Minister Amini in August 1962. The shah appointed his childhood friend and closest adviser, Asadollah Alam, as the new prime minister. With his domestic position shored up and riding the wave of the successful visit to the United States, the shah was able to turn his attention to the Soviet Union. The détente opened the way for Iran to receive economic support from the USSR over the course of the 1960's and undercut his domestic and regional opponents. It was also a double diplomatic victory for the shah in the sense that the deal received the tacit approval of the United States and the shah managed to remain a steadfast U.S. ally even as relations with the Soviet Union improved.

Soviet leadership's approach to Iran changed over the course of 1962 from overtly hostile to cordial. The shah seized this opportunity for warming relations with the Soviets, both because it would lessen the security threat that Iran faced from their Soviet neighbors and from communist dissidents within Iran, and because it would give the shah greater leverage to extract the additional military assistance that he wanted from the United States. On September 15, 1962, the Soviet Ambassador to Iran, Nikolai Pegov, and the Iranian foreign minister, Abbas Aram, formally exchanged a previously-negotiated written pledge from the shah that Iran would not allow any foreign power to establish a missile base within Iranian territory.[539] According to Alvandi, the exchange

> quickly led to the normalization of Soviet-Iranian relations. The hostile Radio Moscow broadcasts stopped and the vitriolic attacks by the Soviet-sponsored 'Voice of Iran' were muted. The shah boasted to the CIA station chief in Tehran, Colonel Gratian Yatsevitch, that he had scored a major diplomatic victory. For three years he had steadfastly refused to give in to Soviet pressure. Finally, Khrushchev had relented and accepted a unilateral missile base pledge.[540]

[539] Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*, 336.
[540] Alvandi, "The Shah's Détente with Khrushchev," 442

The pledge was an unmitigated diplomatic success for the shah that significantly raised his regional and international status. First, the shah was able to get the Soviets to drop pre-conditions they had insisted on in earlier phases of the negotiations. As such, the Soviet's acceptance of the pledge read to the shah as a concession. Second, the shah saw the détente as a way to diminish the regional security threat posed by the Soviet Union. Third, the shah saw Iran's relationship with the Soviets as closely intertwined with domestic threats to his regime. The détente "succeeded in ending the hostile Soviet propaganda campaign against [the shah], and he undercut and embarrassed the Tudeh Party by normalizing relations with their Soviet patrons."[541] It also undercut the foreign policy position of his nationalist/pro-Mossadeq opponents, who advocated for a non-aligned foreign policy.

Finally, the shah was able to achieve this diplomatic success without damaging his relationship with the west. In fact, throughout the negotiations the shah "steadfastly refused to cross the red lines laid down by Britain and the United States on the issue of a non-aggression treaty and Anglo-American intelligence gathering along the Soviet-Iranian border. Nonetheless, the United States had cautiously acquiesced to the shah's missile base pledge,"[542] likely because the Kennedy administration recognized that it also served U.S. interests to "avoid giving the impression that the continuance of present tensions between Iran and the USSR is a US goal."[543]

The detente generated immediate gains for the shah in terms of his regional status. In October, Khrushchev sent a "very warm personal" message to the shah inviting him and his family to visit Sochi, a Russian resort area on the Black Sea, and invited Iran's prime minister to

[541] Ibid; also see Sepehr Zabih, *The Communist Movement in Iran* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1966), 239-241.
[542] Alvandi, "The Shah's Détente with Khrushchev," 443
[543] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Document 51. Record of Action No. 2427, Taken at the 484th Meeting of the National Security Council. Washington, May 19, 1961. U.S. Policy Toward Iran (NSC Action No. 2420; Report of the Task Force on Iran dated May 15, 1961, entitled "A Review of Problems in Iran and Recommendations for the National Security Council").

formally visit Moscow.[544] But it also set the stage for a longer-term warming of relations that had substantial benefits for the shah, without the repercussions of American approbation. Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev paid an official visit to Tehran in November 1963, and shortly thereafter, Soviet leadership signed a series of economic and technical agreements with Iran.[545] The shah's visit to Moscow in June 1965 yielded an agreement for the Soviets to provide steel and machine tool factories in exchange for natural gas, providing much-needed materiel and expertise.[546] The détente allowed Iranian-Soviet trade to boom, and by the early 1970s, the Soviet Union had become the largest foreign market for Iranian manufactured goods.

However, the most important achievement of the détente in terms of Iran's regional status was the signal that it gave that the relationship between the United States and Iran was shifting from a clientelist relationship to one on slightly more equal footing: "Throughout the 1960s, the shah would increasingly assert his independence from the United States."[547] The détente also diminished the shah's fears about the regional threat posed by Nasser's revolutionary movement, because for him, the threat posed by the Arab nationalist movement was directly linked to the Soviet Union. In an April 1962 meeting with the U.S. Secretary of State in Washington, the shah noted that the revolutionary regimes had "switched to Russian arms. They have either sent their people to the Soviet Union, or have accepted missions of experts in the hundreds. Thousands of Egyptians have gone to Russia or Czechoslovakia, officers of the air force, navy, etc."[548] He noted if Nasser "gets what he wants, he might be a source of danger," but also noted that the

[544] Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*, 336.
[545] Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*, 337.
[546] Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*, 296; 337.
[547] Alvandi, "The Shah's Détente with Khrushchev," 443
[548] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Document 247. Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, April 13, 1962, 2:30 p.m. SUBJECT: Last Formal Conversation Between Secretary and Shah: State Visit to Washington, April, 1962 PARTICIPANTS H.I.M. the Shahanshah of Iran Abbas Aram, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hosein Qods-Nakhai, Iranian Ambassador to the U.S. Safi Asfia, Managing Director of the Plan Organization The Secretary The Under Secretary, etc.

revolutionary regimes "are divided, and there is not much chance they can get together." In a mark of the diminishment of this threat in the shah's eyes, the revolutionary Arab regimes occupied very little of the conversation time compared to the Soviet Union and other regional concerns.

Conclusion

Much like the other conservative monarchies, the shah also had reason to be concerned about Nasser's intervention in Yemen. A gain in regional status for Nasser would threaten the shah's regional position and could therefore give encouragement to his most potent domestic opponents, the pro-Mossadeq nationalists, who had seized power until they were overthrown by a CIA-supported coup in 1953, less than ten years earlier.

However, Iran did not intervene in the Yemen civil war or offer indirect or even diplomatic support to the other conservative monarchies because in contrast with Saudi Arabia and Jordan, Iran had not suffered a recent loss in terms of its regional status. In fact, while Iran suffered significant setbacks from the shah's perspective in the late 1950's through 1961, over the course of 1962, right through the beginning of the UAR intervention in Yemen in late September and October 1962, he was able to achieve significant regional gains that from his perspective also significantly shored up the domestic stability of his regime—in fact, the détente agreement was finalized less than two weeks before the UAR's intervention in Yemen began. Throughout the course of the Yemen war, the shah's Iran continued to gain in regional stature. Of course, it is difficult to explain why something did not happen historically, in part because of the difficulty of establishing a counterfactual. However, the evidence presented here strongly

suggests that there was therefore no need to intervene in a civil war to avert losses in regional status.

Case Study 2: Yemen Civil War, 2015-2018

Iran has undeniably provided indirect support to the Houthis through the provision of weapons, resources, and training through the IRGC and Hezbollah. However, while Iran's support for the Houthis is sometimes cited as an important source of the Houthis' military success by Saudi and Emirati officials, this view overstates the empirical effect of Iran's support, which has not had a decisive effect on the Houthis' military capabilities or the dynamics of the conflict. Without access to classified material, it is difficult to precisely determine the level of support that Iran provides to the Houthis. According to the International Crisis Group, as of 2016 "the Houthis receive[d] political, moral and, likely, some degree of military support and training from Iran and Hezbollah," but notably, "this is much less than what the GCC funnels to the anti-Houthi block."[549]

Nevertheless, Iranian involvement with the Houthis has escalated since the beginning of the conflict in 2014: most notably, there is increasingly clear evidence that Iran has supplied missile technology to the Houthis. After the Saudi intervention in the Saada wars in November 2009, Iran provided rhetorical support to the Houthis, criticizing Saudi Arabia for getting involved in the conflict.[550] In October 2009, Yemen's navy allegedly intercepted an Iranian ship off the northwest coast in the Red Sea loaded with anti-tank weapons.[551] However, as of 2009,

[549] International Crisis Group, *Iran's Priorities in a Turbulent Middle East* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2018), 11.
[550] Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen,* 311.
[551] Oren Dorell, "Iranian Support for Yemen's Houthis Goes Back Years," *USA Today*, April 20, 2015.

although Saudi Arabia accused Iran of providing support to the Houthis, there "remained no hard evidence of direct Iranian involvement in [Yemen]."[552]

Through 2011, Iranian support for the Houthis primarily took the form of advice and capacity-building.[553] Iran likely began providing weapons to the Houthis by 2012, with smugglers, backed by IRGC-Quds Force, shipping AK-47s, RPGs, and other weapons to Yemen.[554] A January 2017 report by the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen determined that "The Panel has not seen sufficient evidence to confirm any direct large-scale supply of arms from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, although there are indicators that anti-tank guided weapons being supplied to the Houthi or Saleh forces are of Iranian manufacture."[555] The UN confirmed in January 2018 that fragments of a ballistic missile that was fired into Saudi Arabia in late 2017 was likely manufactured in Iran.[556] The Saudi-led coalition has maintained a blockade of Yemeni ports since 2015, and the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM) was set up in 2016 to inspect commercial goods entering the country. These have significantly limited Iran's ability to provide support to the Houthis. However, the 2017 UN Experts report concluded that the Houthis are receiving weapons such as anti-tank guided missiles "that were not in the pre-conflict Yemeni stockpile" that are "covertly shipped to the Houthi-Saleh alliance over land, along a new supply route from the border with Oman."[557] In addition to material support, according to Peter Salisbury, "A cadre of highly skilled Iranian or

[552] Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen,* 311.
[553] Salisbury, *Yemen,* 32.
[554] Eric Schmitt and Robert F. Worth, "With Arms for Yemen Rebels, Iran Seeks Wider Mideast Role," *New York Times*, March 15, 2012.
[555] Panel of Experts on Yemen, *Final report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen*, 26.
[556] Callum Paton, "Iran's Secret Missile Shipments in Yemen Confirmed By U.N.," *Newsweek,* January 16, 2018.
[557] Panel of Experts on Yemen, *Final report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen*, 2.

Hezbollah operatives is allegedly advising the Houthis directly on the ground, supporting in particular the latter's use of ballistic missiles, surface-to-surface missiles and UAVs."[558]

Hypothesis 1: Status Anxiety

There is evidence that Iranian leaders believed that Iran had suffered considerable losses to its influence in the region since the beginning of the Arab Spring, namely in Syria where its key regional ally Assad was on the defensive, as well as through a decline across the region in Iran's popularity and the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria in the summer of 2014. Over the course of the Arab Spring, perceptions of regional change within Iran transitioned from initial optimism, to concern, to pessimism: by mid-2013, it began to appear "That Iran [was] a net loser from the Arab Spring, and this trend [was] likely to intensify."[559]Although Iran's posture in the region is often perceived by its opponents as offensive in orientation, Iranian leaders see themselves as working to break out of long-standing international isolation and sanctions imposed since the 1979 revolution, in a region dominated by oppositional states with superior military capabilities and backing from a super-power, the United States.[560]

Prior to 2011, the Assad regime was a key—indeed, the only—Arab state ally of Iran in the region. The initial success of the Syrian opposition, and the risk that the regime might be toppled and replaced by an oppositional regime, therefore posed a significant threat to Iran's regional status. In 2011, Suzanne Maloney argued that "unrest in Syria must engender deep-seated angst among Iranian decisionmakers. Should the Assad regime collapse, Tehran would lose its most trusted regional partner and its most reliable mechanism for resupplying Hizballah

[558] Salisbury, *Yemen*, 32-33.
[559] Peter Jones, "Hope and Disappointment: Iran and the Arab Spring," *Survival* 55, no. 4 (2013): 73.
[560] International Crisis Group, *Iran's Priorities in a Turbulent Middle East*, i.

and maintaining direct access to the political dramas of the Levant."[561] Because Syria was an important conduit to Hezbollah, the fall of the regime also threatened Iran's ability to project influence in the region through its non-state actor proxies and allies. Thus, as Jubin Goodzari notes, "If the Assad regime toppled, it could represent the most significant loss for the clerical regime since at least 1988, when it was forced to end the war with Iraq and sue for peace."[562] While other regional states may have perceived Iranian intervention in Syria as assertive, to Iranian policymakers the Syrian intervention was a defensive move: according to International Crisis Group, Iran "sees itself as breaking out of prolonged isolation and stifling sanctions—precipitated by the 1979 Islamic Revolution—that it perceived as historic injustice…After the 2011 Arab uprisings, Iran applied military force to protect a longstanding ally, the Syrian regime, viewing its loss as a possible prelude to its own encirclement."[563]

In the first several months of 2015, the Assad regime had suffered significant setbacks in Syria, likely heightening this sense amongst Iranian leaders. Opposition forces made large gains on the war's northern front, taking Wadi al-Dhaif, one of the Syrian miltiary's largest encampments in December 2014, and the city of Idlib in March 2015. In the south, rebels took the town of Busra al-Sham and the Nassib crossing with Jordan in March 2015. According to analyst Hassan Hassan, writing in April 2015, the shift in Syria in favor of the opposition meant that "For the first time since the conflict began, Assad's heartlands in the western region [were] exposed…The strategic importance of the seized areas and the rebels' improved coordination [could] help the anti-Assad forces push deep into regime-controlled terrain. This [could] likely improve the safety of rebel-held areas significantly and tip the balance in much of the

[561] Suzanne Maloney, "Iran: The Bogeyman," in *The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Saban Center, 2011), 259.
[562] Jubin Goodarzi, "Iran: Syria As the First Line of Defence," in *The Regional Struggle for Syria,* eds. Julien Barnes-Dacey and Daniel Levy (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2013).
[563] International Crisis Group, *Iran's Priorities in a Turbulent Middle East*, i.

country."[564] These shifts meant that Assad's regime was in the most danger that it had been since the beginning of the conflict. Iranian leaders viewed the potential loss of the Assad regime as a critical setback to Iran's "forward-defense" policy of funding regional proxies to counter its regional opponents and break out of its circle of isolation.[565]

Additionally, Iran's overtly sectarian policies from the beginning of the Arab Spring led to a rapid decline in Iran's popularity in the region. Because Iran's strategy to win influence in the region leading back to the 1979 revolution rested in part on its ability to win popular revolutionary support, this decline was also a threat to Iran's regional status. A 2016 poll of the region found that just 5% of Egyptians agreed that Iran contributed to peace and stability in the region, with 8% of Saudis and 24% of Emiratis agreeing. Attitudes toward Iran declined from 2011 levels even in places where Iran tended to be viewed more favorably, like Lebanon (40%) and Iraq (23%). In contrast, attitudes towards Saudi Arabia's regional policy became more positive over the same time period: in the 2016 poll, 67% of Iraqis and 60% of Lebanese polled agreed that Saudi Arabia contributed to peace and stability in the Arab world.[566] The decline in public support for Iran during the course of the Arab Spring also had tangible effects on Iran's efforts to hold together its "Resistance Axis" in the region: in February 2012, Hamas left its headquarters in Damascus in protest of Iran's support for Assad and its sectarian policies in the region, bringing "with it the end of any illusion Tehran might have harbored of exerting influence in the new revolutionary Arab mainstream," according to one analysis.[567]

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[564] Hassan Hassan, "Syria's Revitalized Rebels Make Big Gains in Assad's Heartland," *Foreign Policy*, April 28, 2015.
[565] International Crisis Group, *Iran's Priorities in a Turbulent Middle East*, i.
[566] James Zogby, Elizabeth Zogby, and Sarah Hope Zogby, *Middle East 2016: Current Conditions & the Road Ahead* (Washington, D.C.: Zogby Research Services, 2016), 7.
[567] Tony Karon, "Hamas Signals Break with Iran, But Is That Good for Israel?" *Time,* February 29, 2012.

Finally, after ISIS unexpectedly captured much of western and central Iraq in June 2014, Iran was forced to redirect some of its forces to fighting ISIS. The rise of ISIS posed a direct threat to Iraq's Shi'ia Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, an important friend of Iran. According to Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, "The arrival of ISIS in Iraq posed a major challenge to Tehran…the takeover of Iraq's second largest city, Mosul, by ISIS fighters and usurpation of large tracts of Iraqi territory for the establishment of a new Caliphate, was a most unwelcome development and another sign of weakening state structures of its Arab allies."[568] The fact that Iran almost immediately sent two battalions of the elite IRGC-Quds Force into Iraq suggests the importance that Iranian leaders accorded to defeating ISIS in Iraq.[569] Iran was also forced to redeploy the Iraqi Shi'ia militias that were fighting in Syria back to Iraq, detracting from the fight for the Assad regime's survival. The fight against ISIS also meant that the government of Iraq invited U.S. forces back into the country. Although Iranian leadership likely welcomed the support, it also raised deep "misgivings about U.S. strategic intentions," given that Iran had worked hard between 2003 and 2011 to drive U.S. forces out of Iraq.[570]

A Houthi defeat in the Yemeni civil war would also have represented an additional setback to Iran's regional status. As noted above, Iran has provided increasing levels of support to the Houthis, from rhetorical to weapons and training. Although the Houthis are not a direct proxy of Iran, they are widely perceived as being closely linked to the Houthis, in part because of Saudi and Emirati rhetoric but also in part because of the support that they provide to the Houthis.[571] A defeat for the Houthis would be a setback for Iranian efforts to expand their

[568] Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Foreign Policymaking in the Middle East: Complex Realism," in *International Relations of the Middle East*, ed. Louise Fawcett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 253.
[569] Farnaz Fassihi, "Iran Deploys Forces to Fight al Qaeda-Inspired Militants in Iraq," *The Wall Street Journal,* June 12, 2014.
[570] International Crisis Group, "Iran's Priorities in a Turbulent Middle East," 10.
[571] Personal interview, London, August 2017.

influence in the Arabian Peninsula and in the broader region, and would be a blow to Iranian prestige.

Hypothesis 2: Great Power Relationships

Iran has engaged in a regional strategy of "forward-defense," cultivating asymmetric capabilities by providing support to like-minded actors in the region to counter regional opponents' conventional military capabilities. These asymmetric capabilities shape the options that Iran has available when it comes to intervening in other states, since Iran's power projection capabilities beyond its borders are limited to providing support to like-minded actors, like the Houthis, rather than direct intervention via conventional military capabilities. This explains Iran's level of intervention in the Yemen conflict, but does not necessarily explain why Iran was able to escalate its support for the Houthis from the start of the conflict.

As described in the Syria chapter, while Iran and Russia are not traditional allies, shared goals in Syria led to increasing cooperation over the course of the conflict there, with Russia intervening directly in Syria in September 2015. This cooperation is largely pragmatic and transactional, based on mutual interests, and does not necessarily extend to other geographic areas or issues. The relationship is facilitated by mutual mistrust of U.S. intentions, a revisionist orientation towards the western-led international order, and opposition to Sunni terrorist groups.[572] Nevertheless, Iran does appear to be gradually growing closer to Russia than it has been in previous decades; according to Vali Nasr, like Russia, Iran "is a revisionist power, not a revolutionary one. It opposes a regional order designed to exclude it."[573]

[572] Ellie Geranmayeh and Kadri Liik, *The New Power Couple: Russia and Iran in the Middle East*, (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2016), 2.
[573] Vali Nasr, "Iran Among the Ruins," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2018.

The civil war in Yemen is not a priority for Russia, and Russia has not formally taken a side in the conflict. Yemen is further from Russia's southern periphery than Syria is, and Russia has not had a close relationship with recent governments in Yemen (although the Soviet Union did support the communist PDRY in southern Yemen before unification in 1990.

Thus, Russia has remained largely uninvolved in Yemen and Iran's intervention, in spite of growing bilateral cooperation in other areas. Russia has provided some diplomatic cover for Iran's Yemen intervention at the UN Security Council, abstaining in the vote for UNSC 2216 and vetoing a resolution written by the UK and supported by the United States in February 2018 that accused Iran of non-compliance with the arms embargo on Yemen. It has also publicly criticized recent UN reports that linked missiles fired by Houthi forces to Iran.[574] This support is as much about diplomatic retaliation against the United States for U.S. support for Security Council resolutions on Syria as it is part of a growing strategic relationship between Russia and Iran. As a result, Iran has been able to escalate its involvement in Yemen unimpeded by pressure from a great power ally, and occasional support at the Security Council has indirectly facilitated Iran's supply of increasingly sophisticated weapons to Houthi forces by preventing more robust international action against Iran).

Alternative Explanation 1: Sectarianism/Ideology

Iran and the Houthi movement share support for Shi'ism. The Houthi movement began as a Shi'ia revival movement in reaction to Saudi-funded Wahabbi proselytizing, and revolutionary Iran has invested in exporting its Shi'ia revolution since 1979. Additionally, as articulated above, sectarian dynamics were not particularly salient at the beginning of the conflict, and to the extent

[574] Robin Wright, "Russia and Iran Deepen Ties to Challenge Trump and the United States," *The New Yorker*, March 2, 2018.

that they exist now it is in large part because the interventions on both sides have shaped these dynamics.

However, Iran also makes foreign policy decisions based on other concerns, in addition to sectarian identity, and sectarian identity does not single-handedly dictate its foreign policy decisions. As Ostovar notes, while Iran's support for Shi'ia non-state actors across the region does make Iran's regional policies appear sectarian in nature, "Essentializing Iran's foreign policy as sectarian obscures more than it reveals about its behavior…The majority of scholars who have studied Iranian foreign policy since 1979 do not describe that record of behavior as sectarian, meaning primarily aimed at advancing a pro-Shia agenda. Rather, they see Iran's decisionmaking as closer to realpolitik."[575] While the sectarian dimensions of Iranian foreign policy have increased since 2011, sectarian interests are balanced with security concerns: "There are examples in which shared sectarian backgrounds have facilitated Iran's relationships with non-state clients, primarily with Hezbollah and Iraqi groups, but when viewed against the totality of its foreign policy actions, those relationships are not enough to suggest that Iranian foreign policy has been primarily driven by a pro-Shia impulse."[576]

As articulated in the Syria chapter, Iran's sectarian and security interests are also intertwined in complicated ways that bely a simple sectarian narrative. As Byman notes, from the Islamic Republic's founding, "Iran's leaders saw themselves on the defensive yet believed that aggressively promoting their revolution was the best means of ensuring its survival. Ayatollah Khomeini declared that '[A]ll the superpowers and the [great] powers have risen to destroy us. If

[575] Afshon Ostovar, Sectarian Dilemmas in Iranian Foreign Policy: When Strategy and Identity Politics Collide, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016, p.1-3.
[576] Afshon Ostovar, "Sectarianism and Iranian Foreign Policy", Wehrey, Frederic, ed. Beyond Sunni and Shia: The Roots of Sectarianism in a Changing Middle East. Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 104.

we remain in an enclosed environment we shall definitely face defeat.'"[577] Support for like-minded Shi'ia non-state actors across the region is therefore also a core security interest, seen by Iranian leadership as a means to fight off regional isolation and encirclement by the United States and its allies and partners.

While other Iranian proxies, most notably Hezbollah, look to the authority of Iran's Supreme Leader and senior religious officials for guidance, the Houthis do not. Many analysts point to the example of the organization's decision to take over Sanaa and march south towards Aden as an example of the Houthis' refusal to take direction from Iranian political or religious leadership: Iranian leadership reportedly advised the Houthis against both military offensives, but they decided to go ahead with them anyway.

Instead, Iran's decision to support Shi'ia groups is in part because these are the groups that are interested in and willing to receive support from Iran: for example, while Iran has supported Hamas and other radical Sunni groups in Palestine, Hamas distanced itself from the Iranian "access of resistance" during the Syrian civil war.[578]

Finally, as articulated above, the type of Shi'ism practiced by Yemeni Zaydis differs substantially from mainstream Shi'ism, and is seen by many as being closer to Sunni Islam than mainstream Shi'ia doctrine and practice.

Alternative Explanation 2: Domestic Politics

Iran's relationship with the government of Yemen does not appear to have any bearing on the intervention decision. The Houthis fought President Saleh's government before joining forces

[577] Daniel Byman, Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 92.
[578] https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/hamas-iran-rapprochement-180725150509789.html

with him in 2014, and Iran does not have substantial interests either for or against the government of President Hadi, beyond the support that it receives from their regional opponents.

Domestic bureaucratic politics had an effect in that they likely enabled the intervention by empowering hardliners within the Iranian regime who favored supporting the Houthis. President Rouhani was elected in 2013 with a foreign policy platform of conciliatory behavior towards the United States and in the region. However, Rouhani was largely sidelined in terms of the authority to make decisions about regional policy by regime hardliners, notably the leadership of the IRGC-Quds Force and the security apparatus. The ascendancy of hardliners with authority over regional policy helps to explain why Iran's support for the Houthis escalated over the course of the conflict, and likely explains why Iran began to provide missiles and drones to Houthi forces as well as training and advisory support through Hezbollah.

However, domestic public opinion does not explain why Iran escalated its support for the Houthis throughout the conflict, and in fact pushes against this outcome. Domestic support for Iran's involvement in Yemen declined over the course of the conflict: Zogby polls found that in 2014, 62% of Iranians thought that it was important for Iran to be involved in Yemen, while in 2016, 39% agreed that it was important and 61% of respondents said it was not important.[579] This is partly due to many Iranians' concerns about poor economic conditions domestically. By 2013, the deepening international sanctions had led to a deepening economic crisis which included product shortages, spiraling inflation, and the collapse of Iran's currency, the effects of which were "felt at every level of Iranian society."[580] While the JCPOA was tied to the lifting of some nuclear-related sanctions, other international sanctions remained in place and uncertainty about the long-term viability of the deal left many companies reluctant to invest in Iran. The

[579] Zogby Research Services, *Middle East 2016.*
[580] Suzanne Maloney, "Engagement with Iran: The Sequel," The *Fletcher Forum on World Affairs,* 37, no. 1 (2013): 92.

lifting of some sanctions raised expectations of economic recovery amongst Iranian citizens, but while economic growth has risen and inflation stabilized by 2018, unemployment remained high, especially amongst young people, and sanctions inhibited Iran's full reintegration into international financial markets.[581]

In December 2017, Iranians took to the streets in the largest anti-government protests since the 2009 Green Movement, driven by a middle class that faced unemployment and an uncertain economic future.[582] Protestors have increasingly explicitly criticized the government's assertive regional policies, chanting slogans like "Leave Syria alone and deal with us" and "Neither Gaza nor Lebanon, my life for Iran," reflecting the domestic unpopularity of such regional policies.[583] However, Iran's support for the Houthis has escalated and become more public even in the face of rising domestic opposition. Public opinion therefore does not explain the escalation of Iran's involvement in Yemen over the course of the war.

Additional Hypothesis: Opportunism

Yemen is also a relatively low priority for Iranian leadership, and Iran became involved in Yemen in part because it represented a low-cost opportunity to harass Saudi Arabia, its regional opponent, without incurring significant costs. According to Peter Salisbury, engaging with the Houthis represents a "low-cost initiative that gave [Iran's] intelligence services and Al Quds force operatives access to a country that borders Saudi Arabia, its key regional rival, and is adjacent to important international trade routes." In this analysis, Yemen functions "as a kind if 'laboratory' in which it can test Riyadh, and gauge the US's ability to support Saudi Arabia in

[581] Byman, "Confronting Iran," 116.
[582] Asef Bayat, "The Fire That Fueled the Iran Protests," *The Atlantic,* January 27, 2018.
[583] Ali Fathollah-Nejad, "Opinion: There's More to Iran's Protests than You've Been Told," PBS New Hour, April 3, 2018.

preventing cross-border attacks and assaults on vessels passing through Yemeni waters."[584] Yemen also represents an opportunity for the Iranians to bleed their Gulf Arab opponents at relatively little cost: Salisbury notes that "the Iranians will always get a phenomenally high return on investments. Let's say they're spending ten, twenty, thirty million dollars a year on Yemen. The Saudis are spending billions of dollars a year."[585]

Likewise, the increasing support for the Houthis over the course of the war suggests that Iranian officials have begun to see support for the Houthis as a more enticing opportunity to expand their influence as their Gulf opponents have become increasingly mired in the fighting. According to a 2018 CRS report, "the increasingly sophisticated nature of Iran's support for the Houthis could suggest that Iran perceives the Houthis as a potential proxy to project power on the southwestern coast of the Arabian Peninsula."[586] Thus intervention in the ongoing civil war in Yemen offered an opportunity that would not incur large costs if their side lost. Nevertheless, as Iranian investments in Yemen increase and the international community increasingly views Iran as being closely linked to the Houthis, Iranian prestige and its reputation for supporting its proxies is on the line in a way that increases the costs to Iran of a Houthi defeat.

Conclusion

There is substantial evidence for both the status anxiety and great power hypotheses in this case. Iranian leaders believed that they had suffered losses in terms of their regional status since the beginning of the Arab Spring. In Syria, Iran and the Assad regime were on the defensive, threatening the loss of a key strategic ally as well as supply routes to Hezbollah. Iran

[584] Salisbury, *Yemen,* 33.
[585] Quoted in Niarchos, "How the U.S. is Making the War in Yemen Worse."
[586] Kenneth Katzman, *Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Services, 2018).

had suffered a decline in popularity across the region in part due to its support for Assad and its increasingly sectarianized rhetoric in Syria. The rise of ISIS also placed pressure on the friendly Iraqi government, and meant that Iran was forced to redeploy Iraqi Shi'ia militias from Syria to Iraq. Although Iran's positioning in the region is often perceived by its opponents as offensive in orientation, Iranian leaders see themselves as working to break out of international isolation and sanctions imposed since the 1979 revolution, in a region dominated by oppositional states with superior military capabilities and backing from a super-power, the United States. Thus, even though some of these actions, such as the provision of support for Assad, might have been perceived as offensive in orientation by regional opponents, they were understood by Iranian officials as defensive.

Likewise for Iran, a lack of great power opposition to its intervention, and the occasional diplomatic support of Russia, allowed Iran to escalate its intervention in Yemen largely unimpeded. Iran's asymmetric military capabilities made it more likely that Iran would provide indirect support through the IRGC-Quds Force and Hezbollah rather than engaging directly in Yemen, as it has in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and elsewhere in the region. As for other states in the region, however, Iran's military capabilities are ultimately endogenous to its relationship with great powers: Iran's contentious relationship with the United States since 1979 and its isolation from the international community have closed off the option of developing stronger conventional military capabilities and pushed Iran's leadership towards developing asymmetric capabilities to compensate. Additionally, while Iran's power projection capabilities enabled and constrained its intervention options, military capabilities alone do not explain why Iran chose to escalate its support for the Houthis once the civil war began. Finally, bureaucratic politics, namely the

sidelining of President Rouhani's moderate foreign policy faction by hardline factions including the IRGC in made Iran more likely to support the Houthis.

Chapter 5: United Arab Emirates and Qatar

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar are both small, wealthy states with significant petroleum endowments that were founded in 1971 following the British withdrawal from the Arabian Peninsula. Both states are important to study because since their founding, they have charted foreign policy paths that are unique and outsized in terms of their regional and global influence in spite of their small territorial and population sizes, facilitated by the substantial resources provided by their resource endowments.

However, while both states are members of the GCC, since the Arab Spring began in 2011, the UAE and Qatar have cut very different paths in terms of their regional policies that have brought them into indirect conflict in Libya, Syria, and elsewhere, culminating in the intra-GCC crisis that began in 2017. The leadership of the UAE has sought to empower more secular-leaning and nationalist opposition groups in the region in order to counter the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist-identified groups of various types, while Qatar has chosen to support MB-affiliates and other Islamists. In Libya, while both Qatar and the UAE supported the 2011 NATO intervention, they quickly found themselves on different sides as Qatar began providing support to Islamist networks like the Islamist network run by Ali Muhammad al-Sallabi, while the UAE and its close security partner, Saudi Arabia, began to provide more support for factions led by Mahmoud Jibril and Arif Ali Nayid.[587] By the time the Qaddafi regime was toppled in August 2011, "the Qatari and UAE-backed networks were locked in an intense showdown over who would take control of Tripoli."[588]

In spite of their substantial differences on regional policy, however, both the UAE and Qatar participated in the Saudi-led coalition that intervened in Yemen beginning in March 2015,

[587] See Lynch, *The New Arab Wars*, chapter 3.
[588] Lynch, *The New Arab Wars*, 88.

the UAE in a leadership role and Qatar as more of a back-sit participant. What explains why both of these states, which had such divergent policies in the region, both participated in the Saudi-led intervention?

The United Arab Emirates, 2015-2018

Hypothesis 1: Status Anxiety

As described in Chapter 2, the UAE has been a leader in *Operation Decisive Storm* (and later, *Operation Restoring Hope)* since it was launched on March 26, 2015. While the intervening coalition is often described as Saudi-led, in reality since about April 2015 there has been a de facto division of labor between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, with Saudi Arabia taking the lead on the air campaign in the north of the country, while the UAE has led the southern campaign, primarily through the use of its Special Forces. In July 2015, Emirati forces launched *Operation Golden Arrow* to retake the southern port city of Aden and surrounding territory from Houthi forces. Emirati efforts in Yemen were widely viewed by international observers as more tactically sophisticated than the Saudi-led airstrikes: the offensive to retake Aden involved "more than 3,000 troops supported by Apache attack helicopters and dozens of tanks and armored personnel carriers as well as an amphibious assault."[589]

Within months of the Emirati deployment in southern Yemen, the UAE began to provide significant amounts of economic aid to Aden and the surrounding area, in addition to its investments in equipping and training southern militias, many of which have since been united under the banner of the predominantly secular Southern Transition Council (STC) but include

[589] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-making* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 209.

Salafist militia groups as well.[590] These militias, which numbered some 12,000 fighters, alongside Emirati Special Forces, took the lead in clearing AQAP fighters from areas in the south including Mukalla and the Masila oilfields in 2016.[591] The UAE deployed about 1,500 special operations troops and other forces to Yemen at the beginning of the conflict, and by September 2015, that number is estimated to have increased to 4,000.[592] However, after a missile strike on Mareb in September 2015 killed more than fifty Emirati troops, the UAE has reportedly drawn down some of its own troops, replacing them with foreign contractors operating under the UAE flag.[593]

Additionally, the UAE has deployed forces to several bases in East Africa to support training of local forces and facilitate the UAE's operations in Yemen. The UAE deployed forces to Djibouti for this purpose, but following a dispute with the government in mid-2015, the Emirates relocated and began using facilities in Eritrea instead. The UAE has also expanded its relationship with Somalia, opening a new training center where Emirati Special Forces train Somali commandos in counter-terrorism operations, although this relationship has been affected by the ongoing diplomatic dispute with Qatar.[594]

Policymakers in the UAE share the Saudi leaderships' perceptions of the utility of intervention in Yemen, with some significant sources of divergence. Policymakers in both Saudi Arabia and the UAE saw the coalition intervention as a means of countering what they perceived as Iranian gains across the region over the course of the Arab Spring. The UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan stated in 2015 that "Iran is not carrying out this activity

[590] Ulrichsen, *The United Arab Emirates,* 210.
[591] Ulrichsen, *The United Arab Emirates*, 209.
[592] Ragab, "Beyond Money and Diplomacy," 45.
[593] Helen Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Autocracy, Neo-Liberalism, and the Disintegration of a State* (London: SAQI Books, 2017), 55.
[594] Kenneth Katzman, *The United Arab Emirates (UAE): Issues for U.S. Policy*, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2018), 16.

only in Yemen, it is conducting the same activity in Lebanon, in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and in Pakistan…there is a systematic action that has been going on for years on the idea of exporting the (Iranian) revolution."[595] A prominent UAE businessman with close ties to the regime wrote in an op-ed in *Al-Arabiya* in 2015, "most of this region's troubles are rooted in Iran's thirst for hegemony."[596]

Emirati leaders also shared many of the Saudi leadership's anxieties about lost status in the fallout of the Arab Spring, especially the fall of key regional ally Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak, the signing of the JCPOA without significant input from the Arab Gulf states,

The Yemen intervention therefore represented the GCC states' determination that their regional interests would be best secured only if they acted as a bloc rather than relying on the United States to take the lead, as they had done in the past.[597] The UAE shared Saudi officials' concerns: a *Washington Post* story reported in late 2014 that "Emirati officials do not believe Iran will comply with the terms of any agreement limiting their attempts to build a nuclear bomb—an argument they have made repeatedly to the Obama White House."[598] In November 2014, General James Mattis, who had retired as CENTCOM commander the previous year, said that ultimately the Emiratis' "biggest concern isn't Iran. It's American disengagement."[599]

Like Saudi Arabia, the UAE was also significantly affected by the 2014 global decline in oil prices. In the UAE, a growing economic gap between the richer emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and the five poorer emirates, which only contributed an estimated 12% of national GDP

[595] Quoted in Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Council Sheikhdoms," in *The Small Gulf States: Foreign and Security Policies Before and After the Arab Spring*, eds. Khalid S. Almezaini and Jean-Marc Rickli (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 99.
[596] Ibid.
[597] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Endgames for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen," in *Politics, Governance, and Reconstruction in Yemen*, eds. Stacey Philbrick Yadav and Marc Lynch (Washington, D.C.: POMEPS, 2018), 31.
[598] Rajiv Chandraeskaran, "In the UAE, the United States Has a Quiet, Potent Ally Nicknamed 'Little Sparta,'" *Washington Post,* November 9, 2014.
[599] Ibid.

in 2009, has also generated domestic social tensions.[600] Coming on top of these long-term economic trends, a sharp decline in global oil prices in mid-2014 led to a decline in government revenue, which in turn threatened the late rentier state model of the Arab Gulf states, in which the Gulf monarchies provided subsidies for food, energy, and other consumer goods, employment, and security in exchange for the loyalty of their citizens.[601] The decline in revenue therefore created another source of potential domestic instability just as the dynamics of regional competition also threatened the Gulf states, heightening the perception of threat from an opponent gaining regional influence.

The UAE also risked further losses in the Yemeni civil war. In addition to sharing Saudi Arabia's concerns about an Iranian presence in the Arabian Peninsula, Emirati officials also feared that the conflict in Yemen was allowing Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups, namely the Islah political party, to gain influence in Yemen. As articulated in the previous chapter, the UAE's fear of the increasing influence of MB-affiliated parties in the region was linked to their own domestic security concerns: the UAE perceived the MB "and its affiliates as a threat to Emirati and regional political stability."[602] UAE officials saw their efforts in Yemen, alongside new bases in Eritrea and Somalia and its continued presence in Libya, as "key prongs of the UAE's muscular interregional approach toward countering terrorism, piracy, and Islamist and Iranian influence."[603] Islah, the Islamist coalition opposition party in Yemen that included MB elements, played an outsized role in the NDC process compared to its role in the Saleh government, and MB-affiliated elements were poised to gain from the chaos in southern

[600] Christopher M. Davidson, *After the Sheikhs: The Coming Collapse of the Gulf Monarchies* (London: Hurst & Company, 2012), 131-2.
[601] Matthew Gray, *A Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf*, *Center for International and Regional Studies*, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, 2011.
[602] Salisbury, *Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order,* 12.
[603] Ulrichsen, "Endgames for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen," 33.

Yemen.[604] According to Ragab, a key Emirati objective in Yemen is "through its presence on the ground in Aden, to redefine the new power structure that will take shape after the conflict…[by] reduc[ing] the share of the Yemeni MB as much as possible."[605] Thus, the Yemen intervention is in part a reflection of concern about the relationship between the MB's increasing influence in the region and "domestic threats that were perceived by Emirati officials to emanate from the Muslim Brotherhood."[606]

Additionally, Emirati officials consider their security relationship with Saudi Arabia "to be of the utmost strategic importance." The UAE's role in the Yemen intervention therefore represented a concrete expression of the UAE's commitment to the relationship, and therefore a means of shoring themselves up against potential further loss if they were to allow Saudi Arabia to 'go it alone' in Yemen.[607] Thus, in addition to staving off further losses in regional influence by pushing back against an Iranian presence in the peninsula, the coalition intervention also facilitated UAE efforts to forestall further regional losses to the MB and to maintain its critical security relationship with Saudi Arabia.

Hypothesis 2: Great Power Relationships

U.S. Logistical Military Support: The Obama Administration

By the time that the Yemen intervention began, both Saudi and Emirati officials believed that the relationship between the United States and these two important regional partners had

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[604] Laurent Bonnefoy, "Sunni Islamist Dynamics in Context of War: What Happened to al-Islah and the Salafis?" in *Politics, Governance, and Reconstruction in Yemen*, eds. Stacey Philbrick Yadav and Marc Lynch (Washington, D.C.: POMEPS, 2018), 23.
[605] Ragab, "Beyond Money and Diplomacy," 46.
[606] Khalid Almezaini, "The Transformation of UAE Foreign Policy Since 2011," in *The Changing Security Dynamics of the Persian Gulf,* ed. Kristian Ulrichsen (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), 196.
[607] Kristin Smith Diwan, *New Generation Royals and Succession Dynamics in the Gulf States* (Washington, D.C.: The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, 2017), 16.

frayed. The Obama administration's response to the Arab Spring protest, especially the President's call for President Hosni Mubarak, an important Saudi and Emirati ally, to step down, and the administration's willingness to negotiate and sign the Iran nuclear agreement, or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), eroded the relationship from the perspective of Saudi and Emirati leaders, who believed that both moves had significant negative repercussions for their own regional strategies. The final negotiations for the JCPOA took place in March 2015 and officially concluded on April 2nd just after the Yemen intervention began.[608]

The JCPOA was seen by both sides as bringing the relationship to a potential breaking point. Saudi King Salman signaled his clear displeasure by cancelling his attendance at a US-GCC summit to be held in May 2015 at Camp David, sending a lower-level representative instead.[609] The move "was widely interpreted as a snub," a rare public breach in the relationship.[610] As a result, several U.S. officials have confirmed that when Saudi officials approached them to convey that they were going to intervene in Yemen and to ask for U.S. support, U.S. officials agreed to provide logistical support to the intervention. They believed that a failure to support the intervention would be a breach too far in the relationship; providing support for the intervention may also have been a kind of quid pro quo arrangement in exchange for Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states not publicly opposing the JCPOA.[611] According to Senator Chris Murphy, "The Obama administration was legitimately worried that a major fissure between the United States and Saudi Arabia could weaken the Iran deal;" support for the Yemen

[608] Personal interviews, Washington, D.C., November 2017-May 2018.
[609] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Fire and Fury in the Gulf," Gulf States Analytics, January 31, 2018.
[610] Afshin Molavi, "Iran and the Gulf States."
[611] Personal interviews, Washington, D.C., November 2017-May 2018.

intervention as well as increased arms sales during this period was "a way to placate the Saudis."[612]

As a result, from the beginning of the intervention, the United States has provided significant military logistical assistance to the coalition, including aerial refueling for aircraft engaged in airstrikes, as well as targeting assistance and other forms of intelligence-sharing. Since mid-2016, U.S. Special Forces from Joint Special Operations Command have worked with Emirati Special Forces in southern Yemen in what they say is an advisory capacity to counter-terrorism operations and intelligence gathering against AQAP. About a dozen U.S. Green berets have reportedly also been stationed on the Saudi-Yemeni border since late 2017 to locate and destroy Houthi ballistic missiles and launch sites.[613] The volume of U.S. drone strikes and airstrikes as part of the counter-terrorism mission also increased in coordination with Emirati and partner forces. Notably, U.S. officials conceptually view the counter-terrorism mission in southern Yemen as separate from the coalition's intervention on behalf of President Hadi's government, but in practice this means working with forces that are also opposed to the Houthis.[614] U.S. forces also conducted missile strikes on radar facilities in Houthi-controlled territory in October 2016 in response to anti-ship cruise missiles launched at U.S. Navy warships in the Red Sea.[615]

In addition to direct logistical support for operations in Yemen, the United States also continued to support Saudi Arabia with large arms sales packages. Such weapons transfers increased Saudi military capacity, but also demonstrated implicit support for Saudi strategy in

[612] Quoted in Niarchos, "How the U.S. is Making the War in Yemen Worse."
[613] Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, and Eric Schmitt, "Army Special Forces Secretly Help Saudis Combat Threat from Yemen Rebels," *New York Times*, May 3, 2018.
[614] Salisbury, *Yemen*, 43.
[615] The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Letter from the President – War Powers Resolution: Text of a Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate," October 14, 2016.

Yemen. Between October 2010 and October 2014, the White House approved more than $90 billion in weapons deals with Saudi Arabia. In November 2015, the State Department approved an additional sale to Saudi Arabia of $1.29 billion in air force-related weapons and equipment, including air-to-ground munitions such as laser-guided bombs, that could theoretically be used in airstrikes in Yemen.[616] All told, according to Nicholas Niarchos writing in *The New Yorker*, "By the end of Obama's Presidency, the U.S. had offered more than a hundred and fifteen billion dollars' worth of arms to Saudi Arabia, the largest amount under any President, including warships, air-defense systems, and tanks."[617]

In spite of this support, however, there was concern within the administration almost from the beginning about U.S. involvement with the coalition, especially with regards to the humanitarian effects of the airstrikes. By late 2015, although Houthi forces were implicated in the deaths of hundreds of civilians, the UN estimated that the majority of civilian deaths—about 60%—were due to the coalition's bombing campaign.[618] Coalition air strikes engaged in indiscriminate targeting that led to regular strikes against civilian targets as well as military targets. Andrew Exum, who was appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East Policy in May 2015, reported that "When I arrived, I sensed a lot of frustration [about U.S. support for the coalition]…The Administration was unsure about whether it wanted to be involved in the war. Are we supposed to help the Saudis win or not? I don't think we ever made up our minds there."[619]

The humanitarian effects of the intervention were morally troubling to U.S. officials but also suggested that the United States could be implicated in war crimes. At first, the

[616] Sharif Abdel Kouddous, "With US Help, Saudi Arabia is Obliterating Yemen," *Public Radio International Global Post*, November 30, 2015.
[617] Niarchos, "How the U.S. is Making the War in Yemen Worse."
[618] Kouddous, "With US Help, Saudi Arabia is Obliterating Yemen."
[619] Niarchos, "How the U.S. is Making the War in Yemen Worse."

administration sought to change the behavior of the intervening coalition by providing assistance to improve Saudi targeting. The administration provided a 'no-strike' list of civilian locations such as hospitals and schools, and continued to expand the list to include more than 33,000 targets. According to then-Director of USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance Jeremy Konyndyk, "We broadened and broadened and broadened that [no strike] list over time as the Saudis kept striking things that we would have thought they wouldn't strike."[620] The State Department also sent Larry Lewis, an expert on reducing civilian casualties, to Saudi Arabia several times for consultation on targeting.[621]

About 45 U.S. personnel sat in a Joint Combined Planning Cell in Riyadh, presumably providing advice on targeting, although Pentagon spokespeople have subsequently sought to distance U.S. personnel from targeting choices, stating for example that "at no point did U.S. military personnel provide direct or implicit approval of target selection or prosecution."[622] However, in April 2015 a U.S. official speaking on background said that U.S. personnel "are helping [the Saudis] get a better sense of the battlefield and the state of play with the Houthi forces. We are also helping identify 'no strike' areas they would avoid." U.S. officials also reported that although previous intelligence support had been limited to reviewing Saudi targeting information to affirm its accuracy, it gradually expanded in scope to more detailed "vetting."[623] Increased support did not lead to improvements in Saudi targeting accuracy, however. According to Larry Lewis, while Saudi officials claimed to want to avoid civilian

[620] Quoted in Niarchos, "How the U.S. is Making the War in Yemen Worse."
[621] Niarchos, "How the U.S. is Making the War in Yemen Worse."
[622] Phil Stewart, "Exclusive: U.S. Withdraws Staff from Saudi Arabia Dedicated to Yemen Planning," *Reuters*, August 19, 2016.
[623] Quoted in Reuters, Mark Hosenball, Phil Stewart, and Warren Strobel, "Exclusive: U.S. Expands Intelligence Sharing with Saudis in Yemen Operation," *Reuters*, April 10, 2015.

targets, in the higher ranks of the Saudi military leadership "there was less pressure for change."[624]

The situation came to a head on October 9, 2016, when a coalition 'double-tap' airstrike hit the large funeral of a prominent family's patriarch killing at least 140 civilians and wounding an additional 600.[625] The funeral strike was a watershed for the Obama administration in terms of their approach to supporting the coalition: while until October 2016 they had tried to reduce the humanitarian effects of the intervention by providing additional support, after the strike, the administration publicly rebuked the coalition and began to exert leverage over the coalition through symbolic forms of pressure that lasted until the end of the Obama administration. According to Robert Malley, then-special assistant to the President, for the administration the funeral strike "so clearly symbolized much of what was wrong" with U.S. support for the coalition.[626] Opposition to supporting the coalition also grew in congress following the strike.

An administration spokesperson released an unusually critical public statement almost immediately after the funeral strike, saying

> U.S. security cooperation with Saudi Arabia is not a blank check. Even as we assist Saudi Arabia regarding the defense of their territorial integrity, we have and will continue to express our serious concerns about the conflict in Yemen and how it has been waged. In light of this and other recent incidents, we have initiated an immediate review of our already significantly reduced support to the Saudi-led Coalition and are prepared to adjust our support so as to better align with U.S. principles, values and interests, including achieving an immediate and durable end to Yemen's tragic conflict.[627]

[624] Quoted in Niarchos, "How the U.S. is Making the War in Yemen Worse."
[625] *The Guardian*, "Saudi-led Coalition Admits to Bombing Yemen Funeral," October 15, 2016.
[626] Quoted in Niarchos, "How the U.S. is Making the War in Yemen Worse."
[627] The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by NSC Spokesperson Ned Price on Yemen," October 8, 2016.

The policy review led the administration to reduce intelligence-sharing regarding Houthi forces (but not AQAP targets).[628] The administration drastically reduced the number of U.S. personnel working in the Joint Combined Planning Cell, and placed a temporary freeze on a planned sale of CBU-15 cluster bombs and Raytheon precision munitions kits, a deal worth about $350 million.[629] Speaking on condition of anonymity, an administration official said that the decision to freeze certain weapons sales was "obviously a direct reflection of the concerns that we have about Saudi strikes that have resulted in civilian casualties….It's not a matter of how smart or dumb the bombs are, it's that they they're not picking the right targets. The case in point...is the one on the funeral."[630]

However, even as the sale of some munitions was suspended, others went forward, including a $3.5 billion deal for 48 Chinook helicopters.[631] Jake Sullivan, a senior Obama administration advisor, later testified that the administration's logic behind providing assistance to the Saudi-led coalition "was at least in part that it would give the United States influence in pushing the coalition to (a) abide by international humanitarian law and (b) conduct its military action in a way to maximize the possibility of a diplomatic solution and minimize non-combatant casualties."[632] However, the measures placing a temporary hold on certain deals were largely

[628] Missy Ryan, "With Small Changes, U.S. Maintains Military Aid to Saudi Arabia Despite Rebukes Over Yemen Carnage," *The Washington Post*, December 13, 2016.
[629] Helene Cooper, "U.S. Blocks Arms Sale to Saudi Arabia Amid Concerns Over Yemen War," *The New York Times,* December 13, 2016.
[630] Phil Stewart and Warren Strobel, "U.S. to Halt Some Arms Sales to Saudi, Citing Civilian Deaths in Yemen Campaign," *Reuters*, December 13, 2016.
[631] Ryan, "With Small Changes, U.S. Maintains Military Aid to Saudi Arabia Despite Rebukes Over Yemen Carnage."
[632] Jake Sullivan, Written Testimony, United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs Hearing: "U.S. Policy in the Arabian Peninsula," February 6, 2019.

symbolic, and seen by humanitarian advocacy groups and others as "very limited disciplinary measures."[633]

This leverage exerted through symbolic gestures did succeed in temporarily reducing the tempo of airstrikes and may have limited some of the most egregious targeting of civilians, since a strike at the scale of the funeral airstrikes did not occur subsequently. However, because the measures were largely symbolic, and because the Obama administration was on its way out by the end of 2016, they did not have substantial olong-term effects on the coalition's behavior beyond that. According to William Hartung, the public rebuke, withdrawal of U.S. personnel, and freeze on some weapons sales was "a signal but too weak of a signal. As long as they're refueling aircraft which is central to the bombing campaign, it's hard to see that they're using all the leverage they have.[634]

Another incident in late 2016 also suggests that the U.S. administration was able to alter the behavior of the coalition when it attempted to exert leverage over the coalition. Reports emerged in late 2016 that the UAE developed plans to capture the port of Hodeidah, a major port on the west coast of Yemen that is the last major port controlled by Houthi forces. International humanitarian agencies and the UN warned that an assault on Hodeidah port could have disastrous humanitarian effects, pushing the country towards a widespread famine, since Hodeidah continues to be a key entry point for food and other humanitarian necessities.[635] Reports suggest that when they learned of the plans, "The Obama administration demanded that

[633] The Yemen Peace Project, "America's Role in Yemen 2017 and Beyond" (Washington, D.C.: Yemen Peace Project, 2017), 9.
[634] Stewart and Strobel, "U.S. to Halt Some Arms Sales to Saudi, Citing Civilian Deaths in Yemen Campaign."
[635] Salisbury, *Yemen*, 35.

planning for the operation be halted," and as a result the Hodeidah offensive did not go forward.[636]

The coalition intervention was therefore substantially enabled by the military logistical provided by the United States (as well as to some extent the United Kingdom and France). According to several experts, the Saudi Air Force would be unable to conduct airstrikes in Yemen, at least not at the current operational tempo, without aerial refueling support provided by the United States. According to Bruce Riedel, the United States "is a partner in this war…If the United States of America and the United Kingdom tonight told King Salman that this war has to end, it would end tomorrow, because the Royal Saudi Air Force cannot operate without American and British support."[637] Once the Obama administration decided to exert some leverage over the coalition in late 2016, direct pressure (as opposed to positive assistance measures) led to a decline in airstrikes, but few other significant measureable changes. Obama administration officials themselves believed that the pressure led to changes on the margin but not a fundamental shift in the conduct of the intervention: according to a former senior Defense Department official, the administration became "very frustrated" with the coalition but still believed that the U.S. involvement had an overall positive effect—"It's always hard to prove a negative, but I think we had some success in improving Saudi efforts to minimize civilian casualties on the margins."[638] This is likely because the pressure was largely symbolic and took the form of a rhetorical rebuke, and did not fundementally threaten, let alone remove, assistance that was vital to sustaining the intervention.

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[636] Ibid.
[637] Fred Dews, "WATCH: Se. Chris Murphy on Revisiting U.S.-Saudi Relationship," The Brookings Institution, April 22, 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2016/04/22/watch-sen-chris-murphy-on-revisiting-u-s-saudi-relationship/, accessed March 20 2018.
[638] Dan De Luce, Paul Mcleary, and Colum Lynch, "How the U.S. Got Dragged Into Yemen," *Foreign Policy*, December 11, 2017.

The Trump Administration

The beginning of the Trump administration in January 2017 represented a reset in U.S. relations with Arab Gulf states. Both the Trump administration and Saudi and Emirati leaders saw the new administration as a chance to strengthen the United States' relationship with both Saudi Arabia and the UAE after the relationship had frayed over the course of the Obama administration. The Trump administration was also much less concerned than the Obama administration had been by the end of its tenure about pressuring the Saudi-led coalition to demonstrate more concern for the humanitarian effects of the intervention and to pursue negotiations. The Trump administration's public statements about the blockade on Hodeidah Port in December 2017 are a telling exception in which the Trump administration asserted U.S. leverage to change the coalition's behavior in Yemen.

The Trump administration appeared to have closer personal relationships with key Saudi and Emirati leaders. Senior White House advisor Jared Kushner, who had been tasked with much of the administration's Middle East policy portfolio, reportedly reached out to key leaders like Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and UAE Ambassador to the U.S. Yousef Al Otaiba in the earliest weeks of the administration. On a trip to Riyadh in October 2017, Kushner reportedly grew close with the Saudi Crown Prince, staying up until 4 a.m. "swapping stories and planning strategy."[639] Ambassador Otaiba began to meet with Kushner on a regular basis: *Politico* reported that Kushner and Otaiba were "in almost constant phone and email contact."[640]

These relationships were bolstered by Saudi leaders' apparent eagerness to invest in the United States and buy large U.S. arms packages, which the Trump administration welcomed as part of its jobs-creation agenda. On his first trip abroad President Trump traveled to Riyadh in

[639] Ulrichsen, "Fire and Fury in the Gulf."
[640] Ibid.

May 2017, where he signed a joint "strategic vision" that included $110 billion in weapons sales.[641] Timothy A. Lenderking, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Arabian Gulf Affairs, said that the administration "feel[s] we have truly reset the relationship as a result of this visit."[642] The Saudi Crown Prince returned the visit in March 2018, making stops at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and meeting with tech leaders in Seattle, looking for foreign investment to bolster his Vision 2030 economic reforms aimed at diversifying the Saudi economy and to generate support for the upcoming IPO of Aramco.[643] Additionally, both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have invested several million dollars in lobbying efforts in Washington, D.C. to bolster their image in the United States.[644] Finally, the Trump administration views the war in Yemen through the lens of regional competition with Iran, to a greater extent than the Obama administration did. They view Yemen as another arena in which the United States and its regional allies can push back against Iran's regional influence. The administration has used Iran's support for the Houthis as an opportunity to publicly shame Iran on the international stage in fora like the UN Security Council (see below).

These close relationships and the Trump administration's eagerness to confront Iran have led the Trump administration to uncritically back the coalition intervention in Yemen.[645] According to Bruce Riedel, "it's more important to [the Trump administration] to have good relations with the Saudis, and the Yemenis got sacrificed on this."[646] Within the first months of the administration, Defense Secretary Mattis asked the White House to lift the Obama

[641] Philip Rucker and Karen DeYoung, "Trump Signs 'Tremendous' Deals with Saudi Arabia on His First Day Overseas," *The Washington Post*, May 20, 2017.
[642] Quoted in Eric Schmitt, "Saudi Arabia Tries to Ease Concerns over Civilian Deaths in Yemen," *The New York Times*, June 14, 2017.
[643] Tom DiChristopher, "Saudi Arabia's powerful 32-year-old crown prince has arrived in America. Here's his agenda." *CNBC*, March 19, 2018.
[644] Vivian Nereim and Bill Allison, "Saudi Arabia Reboots Its Washington Lobbying Blitz," *Bloomsberg Businessweek*, April 26, 2018.
[645] Daniel Byman, "Confronting Iran," *Survival* 60, no. 1 (2018): 121.
[646] Quoted in De Luce, Mcleary, and Lynch, "How the U.S. Got Dragged Into Yemen."

administration's restrictions on U.S. military support for the coalition in Yemen.[647] In return, Saudi Arabia made promises to ease U.S. concerns about civilian casualties, according to a private letter from Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir to Secretary Tillerson prior to Trump's visit to Riyadh. The assurances included a promise to engage in a multi-year, $750 million training program provided by the U.S. military, an expanded no-strike list, and to observe stricter rules of engagement. These assurances were seen as conditions for the arms sales officially agreed to during the visit, and supporters of the sales in Congress and elsewhere cited the assurances as important conditions.[648]

However, these assurances did not lead to any change in the conduct of the airstrikes or the intervention more broadly. According to Oxfam's Scott Paul, "The steps that Saudi Arabia [reportedly agreed] to take are irrelevant."[649] They also closely tracked the assurances that the coalition had made to the Obama administration earlier in the war that had little effect without any attempt by the United States to exert any leverage over the coalition to comply. Indeed, analysts argued that the May 2017 trip and arms agreement "undercut any leverage the administration could have had on limiting the war in Yemen."[650] In June 2017, the Trump administration notified Congress that it would resume sales of precision-guided munitions to Saudi Arabia that had been halted by the Obama administration.[651]

The Trump administration has also continued to provide the same logistical military support to the coalition, including aerial refueling and targeting, although DoD spokespeople have given conflicting assessments of the precise support that the United States provides.

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[647] Karen DeYoung and Missy Ryan, "Trump Administration Weighs Deeper Involvement in Yemen War," *The Washington Post,* March 26, 2017.
[648] Schmitt, "Saudi Arabia Tries to Ease Concerns over Civilian Deaths in Yemen."
[649] Quoted in Ibid.
[650] De Luce, Mcleary, and Lynch, "How the U.S. Got Dragged Into Yemen."
[651] Quoted in Ibid.

According to an anonymous military official, "There are still Americans on the ground providing direct support and logistical help to allied troops....We don't share intelligence, but we will advise and accompany them on some of these missions."[652] Additionally, U.S. drone and manned airstrikes against AQAP in Yemen more than doubled in 2017, up to 90 from 38 in the previous year.[653]

This license from the U.S. administration, in turn, has led the Saudi-led coalition to double down on fighting in Yemen. According to an anonymous Western diplomat, "There was a definite [Saudi] shift after the [U.S.] election from an approach of 'we need a deal' to thinking there might be a military solution after all, and that the Americans might help."[654] Indeed, an anonymous Trump administration official noted that ending the Obama-era limits to U.S. support for the coalition would be seen by the Saudis and Emiratis as "a green light for direct involvement in a major war."[655] This also helps explain why the number of monthly coalition air raids increased in December 2016 and January 2017, and has remained high ever since. An anonymous senior official noted that Trump administration officials had expended little political capital to pressure the coalition: "The Saudis sitting in Riyadh are mostly getting advice from the DoD on targeting. That will always undercut the humanitarian argument anyone is making."[656]

A key exception to the administration's uncritical support for the coalition intervention occurred in December 2017, when the Trump administration publicly called for the coalition to lift the blockade on Hodeidah Port. The port, located on Yemen's northwestern coast under Houthi control, is the entry point for 80% of Yemen's imported food and other critical

[652] Ibid; The *Atlantic* reported in December 2018 that although the Defense Department had claimed that the UAE and Saudi Arabia reimbursed the United States for the cost of aerial refueling, they had not actually been "charged adequately," Samuel Oakford and Ryan Goodman, "The U.S. is Paying More Than It Bargained for in the Yemen War," *Atlantic,* December 8, 2018.
[653] Ibid.
[654] Quoted in Salisbury, *Yemen*, 37.
[655] Quoted in DeYoung and Ryan, "Trump Administration Weighs Deeper Involvement in Yemen War."
[656] De Luce, Mcleary, and Lynch, "How the U.S. Got Dragged Into Yemen."

humanitarian supplies. In August 2015, Saudi aircraft destroyed five cranes that were used to unload shipments coming into the port. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) donated $3.9 million to purchase new cranes for the port, but when they arrived coalition ships turned them away.[657]

In November 2017, the coalition imposed a complete blockade on ports and airports in Yemen in response to a ballistic missile that was fired towards Riyadh. International NGOs and humanitarian organizations issued dire warnings about the effects of the blockade, with the World Food Programme noting that "Hodeidah Port is a humanitarian lifeline for millions who are on the brink of famine."[658]

On December 6, 2017, the Trump administration issued a statement that very unusually publicly rebuked the coalition, calling on them to "completely allow food, fuel, water, and medicine to reach the Yemeni people who desperately need it. This must be done for humanitarian reasons immediately."[659] U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley also engaged in efforts to raise pressure on the coalition to lift the blockade and allow the cranes into the port. On December 20th, the coalition announced that it would temporarily end the blockade of Hodeidah Port and allowed for the delivery of the four new cranes. Saudi Arabia also announced after the end of the blockade that it would deposit $2 billion in the central bank in Aden to shore up Yemen's currency and pledged an additional $1.5 billion towards the UN humanitarian response plan.[660] The public nature of the pressure to open the port was seen by observers as key to getting the coalition to comply. Then-National Security Advisor Lt. General H.R. McMaster later

[657] Alex Emmons, "The U.S. Ambassador to Yemen's Hard-Line Approach is Jamming Up Peace Efforts," *The Intercept,* December 13, 2017.
[658] World Food Programme, "Four USAID-Funded Mobile Cranes Arrive at Yemen's Largest Red Sea Port," January 15, 2018.
[659] Quoted in Jeremy M. Sharp, *Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention*, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Services, 2018), 3.
[660] Sharp, *Yemen*, 4.

suggested that Kushner had called Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman for the explicit purpose of addressing the blockade of the port. McMaster reportedly believed that Kushner's intercession affected the Saudi decision to loosen restrictions on Hodeidah.[661]

In the one instance where the Trump administration did use some of its leverage to place pressure on the coalition, the effort successfully changed the behavior of the interveners.

U.S. Diplomatic Role

In addition to logistical military support, both the Obama and Trump administrations also provided the coalition with diplomatic cover at the UN Security Council. As a Congressional Research Service report notes, "From the start of the hostilities, Saudi Arabia was able to secure the support of the United Nations Security Council, a key development in providing the Saudi-led coalition with international approval for its intervention."[662] One month after the intervention began, the UNSC passed resolution 2216, which remains the key framework for international negotiations on the civil war in Yemen. Resolution 2216 imposed an arms embargo on the Houthis and associated forces, called on the Houthis to unilaterally disarm, and legitimized the coalition intervention after the fact under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.[663] As April Longley Alley notes, UNSCR 2216 "essentially calls for the Houthi-Saleh surrender to the Hadi government."[664] It is difficult to imagine the conditions under which the Houthis, who controlled more than half of the population and territory of Yemen, would have unilaterally surrendered.

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[661] David D. Kirkpatrick, Ben Hubbard, Mark Landler, and Mark Mazzetti, "The Wooing of Jared Kushner: How the Saudis Got a Friend in the White House," *The New York Times,* December 8, 2018.
[662] Sharp, *Yemen*, 7.
[663] Afrah Nasser, "The Unfolding UN Failure in the Yemen War," The Atlantic Council, *MENASource,* September 21, 2017.
[664] April Longley Alley, "Collapse of the Houthi-Saleh Alliance and the Future of Yemen's War," in *Politics, Governance, and Reconstruction in Yemen*, eds. Stacey Philbrick Yadav and Marc Lynch (Washington, D.C.: POMEPS, 2018), 13.

Yet despite the clear commitment problem that UNSCR 2216 presented, U.S. officials insisted that it be used as the basis for international negotiations for a political settlement in Yemen.

In 2015 most senior U.S. diplomats, including Secretary of State John Kerry, were preoccupied with the conflict in Syria amongst other global crises, and the U.S. Ambassador to Yemen Matthew Tueller, according to reporting by Alex Emmons, "was largely left to his own devices" in 2015 to shape negotiations.[665] According to current and former State Department officials, Ambassador Tueller used the terms of UNSCR 2216 as a framework for negotiations and opposed the Houthis having any role in Yemen's future government.

Secretary Kerry began to take a more active role in peace negotiations in the spring of 2016, with Oman, a GCC state that did not participate in the coalition intervention, acting as a facilitator amongst the parties. Secretary Kerry announced in late August 2016 that the Quad—the United States, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—had reached agreement on a framework for negotiations. Still, the negotiations aimed to facilitate the disarmament and withdrawal of Houthi forces from Sana'a, and the formation of a unity government, in line with the UNSCR 2216 framework that was favorable to the intervening coalition.[666] The negotiations led to a ceasefire agreement between the Houthis and President Hadi's government in October 2016, and in November 2016, the Houthis along with Saudi Arabia and the UAE agreed to the framework for an agreement. The negotiations were eventually scuttled when Hadi's government refused to endorse this agreement.[667] According to observers, there has been no movement on the negotiating track since the Trump administration came into office.[668] The number of monthly

[665] Emmons, "The U.S. Ambassador to Yemen's Hard-Line Approach is Jamming Up Peace Efforts."
[666] Jean-Marie Guéhenno, "The United States Must Pull Yemen Back from Total Collapse," *The Washington Post*, October 5, 2016.
[667] Yeganeh Torbati, "Kerry Announces Yemen Ceasefire Over Objections of Government," *Reuters*, November 15, 2016.
[668] Personal interview, Washington, D.C., February 2018.

coalition air raids dropped precipitously during the negotiation period, likely because of U.S. pressure on the coalition to participate in negotiations in a productive way.

Thus, U.S. diplomats under the Obama administration provided the intervening coalition with diplomatic support, by framing negotiations in a way that favored the intervening coalition and insisting that both sides adhere to this framework in spite of the positions of forces on the ground. Subsequently, the Trump administration does not appear to have favored or led negotiations at all, allowing the intervention to continue without pressure to negotiate a settlement.

The United States and the UK have also provided the coalition with diplomatic cover by blocking efforts in the UN Human Rights Council to investigate human rights abuses in Yemen. The UK is the penholder on Yemen-related issues at the UN, the result of an informal division of labor amongst the P3 (the United States, the UK, and France) that gives the UK informal jurisdiction over the Yemen portfolio at the UN. Under this system, the UK is charged with taking the initiative on drafting relevant resolutions and negotiating text with China and Russia.[669] After a serious push by an alliance of countries led by the Netherlands led to three weeks of intense negotiations in September 2017, the United States, UK, and France did finally agree to a compromise text that established an international team of experts to investigate human rights abuses in Yemen. However, Saudi Arabia engaged in intense lobbying throughout the negotiations, and the compromise outcome "spared Saudi Arabia…from a formal panel of inquiry like the one investigating the war in Syria."[670] The UK and the United States therefore provided diplomatic cover sparing Saudi Arabia and the UAE from human rights investigations

[669] Security Council Report, "Penholders and Chairs," February 20, 2018, http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-security-council-working-methods/pen-holders-and-chairs.php (accessed February 28, 2018).
[670] Nick Cumming-Bruce, "In a Compromise, U.N. Rights Experts Will Examine Abuses in Yemen's War," *The New York Times*, September 29, 2017.

at the UN that might have placed pressure on the intervening coalition to modify its behavior or negotiate a settlement.

Military capabilities represent a necessary but not sufficient explanation for Saudi Arabia and the Emirates' intervention in Yemen, since both countries needed to possess the requisite capabilities to be able to conduct airstrikes and Special Forces operations on the ground.

Differences between Saudi Arabia and the UAE's military capacities also help explain why the UAE has put forces on the ground whereas Saudi Arabia's involvement is confined to conducting airstrikes without a significant ground presence in the country. Despite decades of support from the United States and other western powers, Saudi Arabia remains relatively weak in terms of its ability to project military power outside of its own borders. According to Michael Knights, Saudi infantry lack both the experience and logistical equipment to execute an expeditionary operation.[671] Saudi leaders' coup-proofing efforts to limit the effectiveness of their military help explains this relative weakness. Limitations in Saudi Arabia's military capabilities help explain why Saudi Arabia has not attempted to deploy troops on the ground in Yemen: it is unable to do so effectively.

In contrast, the Emirati military has developed significant power projection capabilities as part of a concerted effort to do so over the past decade or so. These efforts continued in the years leading up to the Yemen intervention, with the establishment of the National Defense College in December 2013, the institution of compulsory military service in 2014, and a dramatic increase in military spending from $1.9 billion in 2009 to $3.13 billion in 2015.[672] The UAE's power

[671] Quoted in Ben Brimelow, "Saudi Arabia has the best military equipment money can buy—but it's still not a threat to Iran," *Business Insider,* December 16, 2017.
[672] Khalid Almezaini, "The Transformation of UAE Foreign Policy Since 2011," in *The Changing Security Dynamics of the Persian Gulf,* ed. Kristian Coates Ulrichson (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), 200.

projection capabilities were necessary (but not sufficient) to explain why the UAE Special Forces have engaged effectively on the ground in Yemen.

Notably, Saudi Arabia and the UAE's military capacity is endogenous to US and western support, both because both countries have received much of their military training and hardware acquisitions from the United States and western powers, and because the United States has provided additional military logistical support to facilitate the intervention. This is particularly true in the case of Saudi Arabia's air campaign: most observers believe that Saudi Arabia would not be able to maintain the high sortie rate without the aerial refueling capacity provided by the United States.[673] Additionally, U.S.-provided aerial refueling facilitates dynamic targeting.[674]

Alternative Explanation 1: Sectarianism/Ideology

See Chapter 2 on Saudi Arabia.

Alternative Explanation 2: Domestic Politics

In both Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the consolidation of power within the regime and a generational shift in leadership made the decision to intervene. In both countries, over the past few decades, multiple power centers within the regime have checked the most aggressive impulses of one another. However, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's consolidation of power within the Saudi royal family beginning in 2015, and the shift within the UAE that gave the royal family of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi supremacy in foreign policy-making, have enabled the crown princes of both states to engage in more assertive regional policies.

[673] Personal interviews, Washington, D.C., November 2017-May 2018.
[674] Jeffrey E. Stern, "From Arizona to Yemen: The Journey of an American Bomb," The New York Times, December 11, 2018.

Since the early 1960's, the Saudi royal family has governed Saudi Arabia through a system that Steffen Hertog describes as 'segmented clientelism,' where the state is comprised of vertical distributional relationships in which institutions and networks of distribution are separate and parallel.[675] This institutional configuration emerged after the power struggle between King Saud and Crown Prince Faisal in the early 1960's. When Faisal prevailed, he rewarded loyal members of the ruling family with the leadership of the ministries of Defense and Civil Aviation, Interior, and the National Guard. Each of these three agencies has subsequently served as a position of power for different factions of the ruling family, forming a tri-polar balancing dynamic within the regime. Each of the three factions have jurisdiction over different security and intelligence institutions with overlapping responsibilities.

This system was created in order to give each faction access to rents and therefore a source of patronage. However, to Hertog, this "pattern of state-building in which rulers have tended to settle conflicts and build alliances within the ruling family by creating new institutions, positions and sources of patronage…has led to an [sic] cumulative and redundant state-building process that has stabilized dynastic rule, but has imposed great long-term costs and has made policy coordination in important areas difficult."[676] This dynamic has had the unintended effect of limiting Saudi leaders' ability to intervene militarily in the region, both because coup-proofing efforts have weakened Saudi Arabia's ability to project military power beyond its borders and because factions within the royal family have checked one another's more assertive impulses.

This dynamic shifted after Saudi King Abdullah died on January 23, 2015, just one day after the Houthis forced President Hadi to resign. From the beginning of the reign of his

[675] Steffen Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 12.
[676] Steffen Hertog, "Rentier Militaries in the Gulf States: the Price of Coup-Proofing," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 43 no. 3 (2011): 400.

successor King Salman, "the intricate network of Saudi influence and factional balancing, built up for decades by the King's late brother Sultan, appeared on the verge of collapse."[677] Since the ascent of King Salman, his son Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) has taken increasingly assertive steps to consolidate his authority, pushing out members of the royal family who led other factions who might have been able to check MbS' aggressive foreign policy impulses. MbS has served as Minister of Defense since his father ascended the throne and is widely seen as the architect of Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen. Thus, the consolidation of power within the Saudi royal family created the conditions that made direct military intervention more likely.

Likewise, the consolidation of foreign policy-making authority within the emirate of Abu Dhabi since 2008 has created structural conditions that make the UAE more likely to intervene in the region. The United Arab Emirates is a federal system of 7 emirates, and traditionally the leaders of all seven emirates played a role in foreign policy decisions, although Abu Dhabi and Dubai play an outsized role in policymaking at the federal level.[678] However, Abu Dhabi to provided Dubai with a $20 billion bailout to help the emirate deal with the threat of financial panic after the 2008 financial crisis. The bailout led to a shift in decision-making authority that heavily favored Abu Dhabi. Since 2009 Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan (MbZ), the de facto executive of the UAE, has promoted a more assertive role for the UAE in the region and "has constructed a security state apparatus characterized by a hardline and zero-tolerance approach to threat prevention."[679] This has led the UAE to take a more assertive

[677] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Endgames for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen," in *Politics, Governance, and Reconstruction in Yemen*, eds. Stacey Philbrick Yadav and Marc Lynch (Washington, D.C.: POMEPS, 2018), 31.
[678] Khalid S. Almezaini, *The UAE and Foreign Policy: Foreign Aid, Identities and Interests*, (London: Routledge, 2012), 29.
[679] Ulrichsen, "Endgames for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen," 32.

position on countering Iran's role in the region, for example. As in Saudi Arabia, the consolidation of authority within the governance structures of the state created conditions that made the UAE more likely to intervene militarily outside of its borders.

In addition to the consolidation of authority within the Saudi and Emirati states, the Yemen intervention was also preceded by a generational shift in the leadership of both countries. In Saudi Arabia, the position of king has been held by the sons of King Ibn Saud since his death; Crown Prince MbS is the first of the next generation to hold the office. UAE Crown Prince MbZ inherited the role when his father Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, who served as president of the UAE from 1971, passed away in 2004. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan was a charismatic leader who played an active role in expanding the UAE's regional role, for example acting as a mediator during the Iran-Iraq war and in an intra-GCC dispute in the mid-1990s. When MbZ took over the leadership role on foreign policy, this therefore marked a break in UAE foreign policy inclinations. MbS and MbZ share a drive to reorient the regional balance of power and have similar views on the key issues in security and economic policy facing both countries, and they have built a warm personal relationship around their shared views.[680] MbS and MbZ are seen as the architects of the coalition intervention in Yemen. This generational shift, which led to a shift in the regional policy orientations of both countries, is another factor pushing towards intervention in Yemen.

It is possible that the coalition intervention would have happened in the absence of this generational shift in leadership and consolidation of power within the Saudi and UAE regimes since other structural factors were pushing towards intervention. Michael Stephens notes that "there is a tendency to overestimate the impact of [MbS] on foreign policy, attributing almost all of Riyadh's adventurism to him. [This argument] misunderstands that Saudi calculations were

[680] Ulrichsen, "Endgames for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen," 32.

being recalibrated far in advance of the young prince's rise."[681] Saudi Arabia and the UAE may well have begun to pursue more assertive regional policies, including the intervention in Yemen, in response to the structural factors articulated above. However, domestic political factors push in the same causal direction as these structural factors in this case.

This generational shift in both Saudi Arabia and the UAE also led to the loss of institutional and personal connections with important players in Yemen. In the Saudi royal family in particular, senior leaders had built relationships with key officials and tribal leaders in Yemen over the course of several decades. The shift to a new generation of leadership, and the pushing out of other senior leaders in the royal family who had extensive experience working with Yemeni leaders, meant that many of these institutional and personal connections were lost. Some analysts have speculated that the loss of connections has hampered the new Saudi leaderships' ability to understand what is happening on the ground in Yemen, making them over-confident in their ability to achieve their objectives through the use of force rather than more traditional modes of diplomacy in Yemen.[682]

Finally, public opinion in both Saudi Arabia and the UAE has been supportive of the intervention in Yemen, but this is the result of both regime's efforts to sustain support for the intervention by building nationalist narratives and restricting citizens' access to information about the war. The costs of the intervention in terms of resources and military casualties have been relatively high. In order to counteract the effects of these costs on public opinion, both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have embarked on efforts to promote a national identity that takes pride in the states' ability to project power abroad. These efforts at creating a new nationalist orientation have included national museum projects and patriotic displays like military parades

[681] Michael Stephens, *The Arab Cold War Redux: The Foreign Policy of the Gulf Cooperation Council States Since 2011 (New York:* The Century Foundation, 2017).
[682] Personal interviews, Washington, D.C., November 2017-May 2018.

and memorials to 'martyrs' who have died in conflict.[683] Writing in Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya, in an opinion piece titled "A Salute to Our Heroes Liberating Yemen," a prominent Emirati businessman declared that the news of the intervention's beginning "brought peace of mind and filled my heart with pride, feelings I'm certain are shared by my Emirati compatriots."[684] Additionally, most ordinary Saudis and Emiratis do not have access to accurate information about what is going on in Yemen as the government restricts access to outside media sources. This facilitates the governments' ability to project a nationalist narrative around the Yemen intervention. According to Ulrichsen, "The scale of Emirati and Saudi casualties in the Yemen campaign has changed the discourse on security and conflict in both countries and led to the rise of a 'cult of martyrdom' in the UAE in particular."[685] In September 2015, 45 Emirati soldiers were killed in one Houthi attack, a national trauma given the relatively small size of the UAE population. The Crown Prince personally met with each family of soldiers killed in Yemen and promised government support.[686] The UAE built a large public monument, the Martyr's Monument, in Abu Dhabi commemorating Emiratis killed in conflict and established Martyr's Day as a national holiday.[687] However, the causal direction runs in the opposite direction here: rather than nation-building efforts causing the intervention to be sustained over time, both regimes have been deliberately engaged in nation-building efforts to sustain support for the intervention, even as it has continued at a relatively high cost without any major victories for the coalition.

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[683] Ed. Kristin Smith Diwan, *Gulf Societies in Transition: National Identity and National Projects in the Arab Gulf States* (Washington, D.C.: Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, 2016), 6.
[684] Khalaf Ahmad Al Habtoor, "A Salute to Our Heroes Liberating Yemen," *Al Arabiya*, March 27, 2015.
[685] Ulrichsen, "Links Between Domestic and Regional Security," 16.
[686] Karim Fahim, "Houthi Rebels Kill 45 U.A.E. Soldiers in Yemen Fighting," *The New York Times,* September 4, 2015.
[687] Sami Zaatari, "UAE Honours its Martyrs with a Permanent Memorial," *Gulf News*, November 30, 2016.

Qatar, 2015-2018

Qatar participated in the Saudi-led coalition intervention from March 2015 until it was expelled from the coalition in June 2017 following the resurgence of the intra-GCC dispute. Qatari pilots participated in airstrikes early on in the intervention, and *Al Jazeera* reported that Qatar sent 1,000 ground troops along with 200 armored vehicles and 30 Apache helicopters in the early fall of 2015; however, Qatari troops remained at the Saudi border and did not deploy into Yemen.[688] The extent of Qatari participation in the intervention is uncertain, with some analysts suggesting that the Qatari contribution was largely symbolic. According to David Roberts, "Qatar has played an active—albeit small—role. Qatari planes [have been] used in concert with their GCC allies attacking Houthi targets, and reports indicate that Qatar eventually deployed 1,000 troops in Yemen. In reality, the Qatari deployment was likely far smaller;" however, deploying any troops outside of the country, even if they are not involved in combat, would constitute an unusually assertive step for Qatar.[689]

Hypothesis 1: Status Anxiety

Qatar's decision to join the coalition intervening in Yemen was driven by the logic of bandwagoning, which was intended to forestall a further loss of influence in the region following the 2014 GCC crisis. Qatari leaders did not perceive the rise of a Houthi government to be threatening to their regional influence in the same way that Saudi Arabia and the UAE did: Qatar maintains a relationship with Iran that could be described as cautiously cordial, although not

[688] *Reuters*, "Qatar Sends 1,000 Ground Troops to Yemen Conflict: al Jazeera," September 7, 2015; personal interviews, Doha, April 2018.
[689] David Bryn Roberts, *Qatar: Securing the Global Ambitions of a City-State* (London: Hurst, 2017), 162.

necessarily friendly, largely because of the shared North Dome/South Pars gas field.[690] Rather, Qatar's participation was designed to stave off further losses in its influence in the region after the setback of the 2014 intra-GCC crisis. Participation in the Saudi-led coalition was intended by Qatari leaders as a demonstration of Qatar's willingness to go along with Saudi Arabia's leadership in the GCC and that it was willing to be a 'team player' by bandwagoning with the rest of the GCC.

Since the mid-1990's, when Emir Hamid bin Khalifa Al Thani came to power, Qatar has pursued a foreign policy of hedging between its powerful neighbors Saudi Arabia and Iran. Qatar has positioned itself firmly beneath the U.S. security umbrella, and sometimes bandwagons with Saudi Arabia, but also maintains cordial relations with Iran and cultivated relationships with non-state Islamist actors such as the Muslim Brotherhood in the region.[691] Through this hedging strategy, Qatar pursued a "carefully calibrated policy…ensur[ing] that it maintained open lines of communication with as many parties and actors as possible, even if they happened to be adversaries to one another."[692] Although Qatar pursued a more assertive regional strategy in the early years of the Arab Spring, actively supporting opposition forces in Libya, Syria, and elsewhere (see Syria chapter), the ascension of Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in June 2013 signaled a turn towards a more cautious regional approach. The new Emir was more focused on internal issues: the appointment of the Minister of the Interior to serve as Prime Minister, a role that had previously been held by the Foreign Minister, was indicative of this approach. Emir Tamim's regional approach, while remaining in line with the strategy of hedging, shifted in

[690] Steven Wright, "Foreign Policy in the GCC States," in *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf,* ed. Mehran Kamrava, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011).
[691] Mehran Kamrava, *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 74**.**
[692] Kamrava, *Qatar*, 41.

emphasis from more independent-minded regional intervention towards maintaining a low profile and bandwagoning with Saudi Arabia.

Qatar has experienced periodic tensions in its relations with other members of the GCC over the past few decades, but according to Gregory Gause, "their common domestic political systems and their common interest in avoiding a Persian Gulf dominated by either Iran or Iraq have kept the Saudis and the smaller monarchies more together than they have been apart" since the founding of the GCC in 1981.[693] However, tensions between Qatar and the other GCC states had been rising since the early phase of the Arab Spring when Qatar began sponsoring Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups in the region (see Syria chapter). As a demonstration of their opposition to Qatar's regional policies, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain withdrew their ambassadors from Doha in March 2014, initiating an intra-GCC crisis. The diplomatic break was quickly followed by several demands, including that Qatar stop supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and curtail *Al Jazeera*'s oppositional coverage of the new Sisi regime in Egypt. After 9 months of negotiations, Qatar made some concessions; most notably, several MB members who were living in exile were expelled from Qatar. The GCC ambassadors returned in November 2014, thus signifying the end of the crisis.[694]

The intra-GCC crisis had significant negative implications for Qatar: the value of Qatar's oil exports fell about 40% between July 2014 and July 2015, a major issue since more than 90% of Qatar's government revenues are tied to the energy sector. Qatar was also highly dependent on trade across its land border with Saudi Arabia, with 23% of imports by value coming across the land border, including a large proportion of the materials fueling Qatar's pre-2020 World Cup construction boom. Additionally, as the ongoing GCC crisis beginning in 2017 indicates, if the

[693] F. Gregory Gause III, "Saudi Arabia's Regional Security Strategy," in *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf,* ed. Mehran Kamrava (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 174.
[694] Roberts, *Qatar*, 152.

dispute had not been resolved it could have posed a threat to Qatar's critical security relationship with the United States. Its leadership was therefore motivated to find a face-saving way to end the dispute and enter back into the GCC fold.

Qatar's participation in the Saudi-led coalition was therefore an effort to forestall another crisis with Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states that, as in 2014, would have significant negative effects on Qatar's regional influence. According to David Roberts, Qatari participation in the coalition "must be seen in the context of the 2014 pressure heaped on Qatar by Saudi Arabia and the UAE to reform its foreign policies, conform to the GCC, and join their campaign against regional threats."[695] Joining the coalition gave Qatari leadership an opportunity to go further to "re-cohere and repair fractured relationships" as demonstrated by "the raft of high-level meetings between Qatari and Emirati leaders in the months that followed," according to Kristian Ulrichsen.[696]

Alternative Explanation 2: Domestic Politics

Qatar's previous relationship with the warring parties in Yemen appears to have had no bearing on its involvement in the intervention. As part of its role as a regional mediator prior to the beginning of the Arab Spring, Qatar had taken a neutral approach to the Yemeni government and the Houthis, leading to ultimately failed efforts to mediate between President Saleh and the Houthis in 2006 and 2007.[697]

[695] Roberts, *Qatar,* 151.
[696] Ulrichsen, *The United Arab Emirates*, 211.
[697] Kenneth Katzman, *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2017), 12.

Alternative Explanation 2: Sectarianism/Ideology

Qatar's regional policies are not guided by sectarian affiliation as much as Saudi Arabia and the UAE are. While Qatar has tended to support Sunni Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups in the region, it also maintains cordial relations with Shi'ia Iran (due in part to a shared major natural gas field).

Conclusion

The status anxiety and great power relationship hypotheses help to explain the Emirates' and Qatar's decision to participate in the intervention in spite of their substantial policy differences. While sectarian explanations point in the same causal direction, they are not ultimately satisfactory to explain the intervention decision. Finally, domestic politics explanations including bureaucratic politics and public opinion fall short in these cases.

Like Saudi Arabia, Emirati officials also believed that their regional status had declined in the region vis-a-vis their regional opponent, Iran, since the beginning of the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring protests had led to the downfall of important regional allies like Egyptian President Mubarak and generated significant internal instability in others like Bahrain. Emirati officials likely worried that the negotiation of the Iran nuclear deal would facilitate support for Iranian-affiliated actors in the region like the Houthis by lifting international sanctions, and that the apparent shift in the Obama administration's regional orientation could even threaten its critical security relationship with the United States by auguring a U.S.-Iran détente. The 2014 decline in global oil prices also threatened the UAE's rentier model of domestic security.

The UAE also had a stake in the outcome of the conflict, as Emirati officials were concerned that a Houthi victory would facilitate expanded Iranian influence in the Gulf

peninsula. Emirati officials were also intent on forestalling the rise of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated factions including the Islah party.

Qatar's participation in the intervention is more of a puzzle at the surface: in 2014, Saudi Arabia and the UAE along with other GCC countries initiated a diplomatic dispute with Qatar, pressuring officials to make several substantial policy changes. While the crisis was resolved after 9 months of negotiations, it would be easy to understand if Qatari officials were subsequently reluctant to participate in GCC security-related activities. Qatari officials also later claimed that they believed the intervention had been a bad idea from the outset.[698] While this analysis may have changed in hindsight, it is notable that in spite of Qatar's Special Forces capabilities, Qatar did not deploy troops inside of Yemen or contribute substantially in other ways to the intervention.

Nevertheless, the status anxiety Hypothesis also helps to explain Qatari participation in the coalition at the outset. Qatar's decision to join the coalition intervening in Yemen was driven by a bandwagoning logic intended to forestall a further loss of influence in the region following the 2014 crisis. Qatari leaders did not perceive the rise of a Houthi government to be threatening to their regional influence in the same way that Saudi Arabia and the UAE did; rather, Qatar's participation was designed as a demonstration of Qatar's willingness to go along with Saudi Arabia (and to some extent the UAE's) leadership in the GCC and to show that it was willing to be a 'team player,' forestalling further diplomatic or economic punishment from other GCC states. The previous relationship and sectarianism hypotheses do not appear to have played a role in this case.

[698] Personal interviews, April 2018, Doha.

Second, regional states' great power relationships help to explain the intervention decision. U.S. support for the Saudi-led coalition facilitated intervention at a higher level on the intervention scale. While the UAE would likely still have been able to deploy its highly capable Special Operations forces in the south, UAE forces are reportedly working alongside U.S. Special Forces on counter-terror operations in the south; U.S. support has therefore also facilitated this troop presence. Additionally, the United States, alongside the UK, has provided diplomatic cover for the intervention at the UN Security Council that has allowed the coalition to dodge international pressure to negotiate a settlement or modify its behavior to minimize the humanitarian effects of the intervention.

The intervention is also facilitated by the military capabilities of the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The UAE's battle-tested Special Forces' capabilities made it possible to deploy troops on the ground, while Saudi Arabia's military weakness and relative lack of power projection capabilities made it unlikely that Saudi Arabia would deploy troops far beyond the border. However, for the coalition, military capabilities are largely endogenous to their strategic relationship with the United States, both because the United States has provided training and weapons transfers to both countries over the past few decades, building up their military capabilities, and because U.S. assistance to the intervention bolstered the coalition's capability to project power beyond the borders of the key intervening states.

Domestic bureaucratic politics also enabled the coalition intervention. As in Saudi Arabia, ruling coalitions in the UAE that had previously been more factionalized experienced power consolidation in the hands of one leader prior to the Yemen conflict. A generational shift in leadership also made intervention more likely to occur, as younger leaders set out to make their mark on regional politics without the institutional and personal connections of their parents'

generation. However, while public opinion in both Saudi Arabia and the UAE appeared favorable to the intervention and to remaining in Yemen, this is the result of both regimes' efforts to stoke nationalist sentiments around their militaries and to prevent citizens from accessing accurate information about the conflict. Public support for the intervention is therefore largely an effect of the intervention, rather than a cause.

While domestic politics, military capabilities, and the dynamics of the conflict itself point in the same causal direction as the two main hypotheses, the findings suggest that military capabilities are important, but are ultimately endogenous to great power support. Military capabilities enable and constrain different levels of intervention, but they do not explain why the Saudi-led coalition chose to use its power projection capabilities in Yemen. Additionally, with regards to the domestic politics Hypothesis, bureaucratic political dynamics made continuing intervention more likely, but public opinion does not explain why the coalition's intervention has continued largely unabated since March 2015.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

In this dissertation, I have explored the conditions under which MENA states are more (or less) likely to intervene in civil wars in the region, and the degree to which they are likely to intervene. Although intervention is a complex and multi-causal phenomenon, I focus on regional and international explanations for intervention. While much of the existing literature on intervention, particularly the quantitative literature, focuses on the dynamics of the conflict itself to explain outcomes *following* intervention (i.e., where intervention is the explanatory variable),[699] my research seeks to fill a critical gap in the literature by developing and testing theoretical explanations for intervention that locate the causes primarily outside of the dynamics of the civil war itself, while also investigating a set of alternative explanations that are derived from the literature.

The puzzle motivating my research is why states engage in costly interventions that have a poor track record of success and often lead to sub-optimal outcomes by generating conflict escalation, regional instability, and humanitarian crises.

Regional intervention in MENA civil wars had a poor record of success—at least in the terms that success is commonly understood, both in the literature and in common understanding—over the course of the 20th century. The record of intervention since 2011 in ensuring victory by one side, forestalling conflict and its humanitarian consequences, and preventing regional instability has been equally abysmal.

After ISIS swept across Iraq in 2014, a U.S.-led coalition conducted airstrikes in an uneasy form of tacit cooperation with Iranian-backed militias. Although ISIS was evetually

[699] There are only a handful of notable exceptions, e.g. see Idean Salehyan's research on refugee communities, cross-border bases, and transnational insurgency; Idean Salehyan, *Rebels Without Borders: Transnational Insurgencies in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

driven out of Iraq over the subsequent several year period, the increased influence of Iranian-backed militias in the Iraqi government raises questions about the country's stability.

In the eight years after the NATO intervention in Libya that was intended to prevent mass casualties, Libya has fallen in and out of civil war, with no organization able to extend the control of the state over all of Libya's sovereign territory. Since 2014, several factions have fought for control over the state, with General Khalifa Haftar's so-called Libyan National Army based in eastern Libya receiving support in the form of airstrikes from Egypt and the UAR, and the General National Congress, based in Tripoli, receiving backing from Turkey, Qatar, and Sudan.

In Syria, after eight years of brutal fighting with devastating consequences for civilians, the civil war appears to be winding down. Most of the Gulf states have made diplomatic overtures to the Assad government they had opposed via support for rebel militias. However, Turkey's interests in the northeast of the country, and repeated threats that the Turkish military could intervene in northern Syria to push back against U.S.-backed Kurdish forces, are a potential flashpoint for violence.

Competition amongst Arab Gulf monarchies is sowing instability elsewhere in the region as well. In Somalia and across the Horn of Africa, the UAE and Qatar have "each provid[ed] weapons or military training to favored factions, exchanging allegations about bribing local officials, and competing for contracts to manage ports or exploit natural resources."[700] In the wake of a revolutionary transition in Sudan this past spring, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi's support for the military junta has helped create perverse incentives that limited the Transitional Military Council's willingness to share power with civilian protestors and to democratize.

[700] Ronen Bergman and David D. Kirkpatrick, "With Guns, Cash and Terrorism, Gulf States Vie for Power in Somalia," *The New York Times*, July 22, 2019.

Finally, in Yemen, as we have seen, regional intervention has exacerbated an existing civil war conflict, generating the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. While the UAE recently redeployed its troops and effectively pulled back across the western coast and in the south, violence between the Southern Transition Council-affiliated militias that the Emiratis support and the Saudi-backed government of President Hadi is threatening to ignite regional tensions underlying conflict in Yemen since unification in 1991 and create a civil war within a civil war.[701]

This track record suggests that regional leaders who pursue interventionist policies either over-estimate their chance of 'success' as understood in traditional terms, or have a different understanding of what constitutes success, or both. I argue that while misperception may play a role here, leaders have a clear historical record that should mitigate against misperception and over-confidence. Additionally, misperception or over-confidence does not explain variation in intervention decisions (unless there is an underlying variable that systematically shapes misperception). I argue that rather than focusing on these commonly understood metrics of success, regional leaders are concerned with their regional status and how intervening versus failing to intervene could shape their regional status, or ranking. Additionally, a state's relationship with great powers, especially great power patrons, shapes intervention decisions because regional states almost universally rely on great powers to meet their material security needs, and because they are almost universally incapable of sustaining an intervention outside of their own borders without significant assistance.

[701] Alexandra Stark, "The Keys to Peace in Yemen," *Fair Observer*, October 17, 2018.

Why Study Intervention?

When states intervene in civil wars, they are effectively taking a gun to a knife fight. Military intervention often transforms relatively localized conflicts into destabilizing regional conflicts that spill across borders. These regionalized conflicts tend to last longer, generate higher numbers of both battle deaths and civilian casualties from violence, and generate devastating humanitarian effects. Recent wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Somalia, Yemen, and elsewhere have generated unprecedented humanitarian crises and contributed to a wave of refugees, who have significant impacts on the domestic politics of the countries they arrive in, as well as trans-national security implications. These conflicts frequently spill across state borders, threatening the stability of neighboring states and providing potent breeding grounds for organizations like ISIS and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, with major security implications not only for their hosts but for the world.[702] Analysts have increasingly pointed to the politicization of the global refugee crisis as one of several drivers of the global rise of right-wing populist movements.[703]

Findings

Summary of Hypotheses

In each case study, I have used process tracing to test two hypotheses as well as two alternative explanations.

[702] Idean Salehyan and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, "Refugees and the Spread of Civil War," *International Organization* 60, no. 2 (2016); Daniel Krcmaric, "Refugee Flows, Ethnic Power Relations, and the Spread of Conflict," *Security Studies* 39, no. 5 (2013); Daniel Milton, Megan Spencer, and Michael Findley, "Radicalism of the Hopeless: Refugee Flows and Transantional Terrorism," *International Interactions* 39, no. 5 (2013).
[703] Michał Krzyżanowski, Anna Triandafyllidou, and Ruth Wodak, "The Mediatization and the Politicization of the 'Refugee Crisis' in Europe," *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 16, no. 1-2 (2018).

Hypothesis 1 argues that regional leaders are deeply concerned about their state's regional status, or ranking in the hierarchy of states that they perceive themselves as being in competition with. States are more likely to intervene when their leadership believes they have experienced a recent loss in terms of their regional status, and when they believe that the outcome of the conflict will reflect on their regional status (i.e., when they believe they have a stake in the outcome because they prefer that one side win). This Hypothesis suggests that rather than misperceiving the chance of success or experiencing over-confidence, leaders are more willing to take on the additional risk that intervention entails in a bid to recover from a recent perceived loss in regional status.

Hypothesis 2 argues that the potential intervener's relationship with great power patrons will also affect the decision to intervene. Because states in the region depend almost entirely on great powers to acquire and sustain their military capabilities,[704] if a great power chooses to exert the leverage that it possesses over a regional partner to push back against intervention, the regional state is more likely to intervene at a lower level on the intervention scale. However, if a great power patron does not use its leverage, or provides military logistical assistance to the intervention, regional states are more likely to intervene at a higher level on the ladder.

The first alternative explanation suggests that states may intervene on behalf of other states or non-state actors who hare an ideological orientation or sectarian identity. While sectarianism and ideology are baked into regional competition, I argue that this more essentialist version of the sectarian/ideological argument fails to account for the ways that different identities become more or less salient under different conditions, and how states have instrumentally

[704] Or in the case of Iran, have designed a military strategy around developing asymmetric capabilities that are designed to supplement and circumvent the conventional weakness that Iran suffers due to a lack of a great power patron that can provide such capabilities.

mobilized identity categories to bolster their regional strategy. This suggests that these identity categories are tools or by-products of intervention decisions, rather than straight-forward causes.

The second alternative explanation encompasses a variety of domestic political, or second image, explanations for intervention. Again, because intervention decisions are multi-causal and complex, domestic politics enters into these decisions in a variety of ways. A state could be more likely to intervene to support an ally; could be less likely to intervene if there are a larger number of domestic veto players; and intervention could be shaped by the characteristics of individual leaders and/or public opinion.

As I demonstrate in the case studies, while these second image explanations (and in the case of individual leaders, first image explanations) are a part of the puzzle of explaining intervention decisions, they do not entirely account for these decisions. Previous relationships are part of states' calculations of their regional status, but do not necessarily explain variation in intervention. Veto player explanations may be salient, but because there tend to be few veto players in the MENA autocracies, especially veto players who can affect sensitive security decisions, this theory fails to explain variation as well. However, in each case I explore who key veto players are, and what their preferences are, as well as the personalities and preferences of individual leaders, whenever that information is available.

Case Study Findings

Table 3 summarizes the findings from each of the case studies. In each column, explanations that correctly point in the direction of the dependent variable are in bold. As this table shows, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 are the explanations that most often correctly predict

the outcomes of each case, although the alternative explanations are sometimes salient as well. The findings from each case are as follows.

Table 3: Summary of Case Study Findings

CASES	DV	HYPOTHESIS 1: STATUS ANXIETY	HYPOTHESIS 2: GREAT POWER RELATIONSHIPS/ CAPABILITIES	ALTERNATIVE 1: SECTARIANISM/ IDEOLOGY	ALTERNATIVE 2: DOMESTIC POLITICS
SAUDI ARABIA: 1962	Indirect	**High**	**Leverage**	**More likely**	Indeterminate
2015	Direct	**High**	**Support**	**More likely**	Indeterminate
EGYPT: 1962	Direct	**High**	**Support**	**More likely**	Indeterminate
2015	Direct	**High**	**Support**	Neutral	Less likely
IRAN: 1962	None	**Low**	n/a	More likely	Indeterminate
2015	Indirect	**High**	**Neither**	**More likely**	**More likely**
UAE: 2015	Direct	**High**	**Support**	**More likely**	Indeterminate
QATAR: 2015	Direct	**High**	**Support**	Neutral	Indeterminate

Key for Table 3:

HYPOTHESIS 1: high status anxiety makes intervention MORE LIKELY
HYPOTHESIS 2: great power support makes intervention MORE LIKELY
A1: does sectarianism/ideology make intervention MORE LIKELY (or neutral, i.e. sectarianism/ideology doesn't correspond to empirical patterns of intervention)
A2: does domestic politics make intervention MORE LIKELY or LESS LIKELY (or indeterminate causal direction; that is, domestic politics doesn't push in either direction)

- **Saudi 1962:** Saudi leaders believed that Saudi Arabia's regional status ranking had suffered in the late 1950's and early 1960's due to the gains that their regional rival, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and other revolutionary regimes had made across the region. The success of Nasser's revolutionary movement was viewed by Saudi leaders as provoking instability within Saudi that could threaten the regime. Additionally, Saudi Arabia was held back in part from intervening more directly by both its military weakness and U.S. pressure, which stood in stark contrast to U.S. tolerance of, and Soviet logistical support for, Egypt's intervention. While ideology and domestic politics played a role, ideological affinities were motivational primarily through the prism of regional competition, while domestic politics explanations are causally indeterminate.

- **Saudi 2015:** Saudi leaders believed that their regional status had suffered due to the losses of the Arab Spring, a sharp decline in oil prices in 2014, and the signing of the JCPOA just before the intervention in Yemen began. Additionally, U.S. logistical support from the beginning of the intervention helps explain why the Saudi-led coalition was able to intervene with ground forces and why Saudi Arabia itself led the air campaign in northern Yemen. Bureaucratic political dynamics contribute to explaining the intervention, but public opinion does not explain why the coalition escalated its involvement in Yemen from 2015 through 2018. Saudi Arabia's previous relationship with the Saleh regime also played a role in the intervention, but this relationship was built around shared security concerns rather than defending an embattled ally. The dynamics of the conflict itself also help explain why the war itself, and therefore the intervention, has continued.

- **Egypt 1962:** Status anxiety and great power relationships are the best explanations for Egypt's intervention in North Yemen beginning in 1962. Nasser believed that Egypt had experienced a significant loss in regional status due to Syria's secession from the United Arab Republic, and saw intervention in Yemen as a means of shoring up against further losses. Egypt's relationship with both the Soviet Union and the United States, and the military capacity provided by these relationships, also explains Egypt's ability to intervene. Neither alternative provides a satisfying explanation in this case. While ideology helps explain Nasser's support for the new Yemeni regime, Egypt's relationship with the Imamate was more complicated. And while the Egyptian military's eagerness to intervene may have facilitated intervention, contemporary accounts clarify that Nasser had the ultimate decision-making authority. Alternative explanations also do not explain the observed variation in Egypt's intervention behavior over the course of the conflict.

- **Egypt 2015:** The status anxiety and great power relationship hypotheses are the most satisfying explanation for Egypt's otherwise puzzling decision to participate in the Saudi-led coalitions intervention. Openly defying the Arab Gulf states would have further threatened Egypt's declining status since the regime relied heavily on Gulf political support, as well as funding and investment. The Sisi regime was able to thread this needle by providing token support to the intervention while expressing reservations about the strategic utility of intervenion. Furthermore, the Obama administration's decision to lift a freeze on arms sales to the regime less than a week after the intervention began, and the United States' outward support for the Saudi-led intervention, were clear signals from Egypt's most important and powerful patron.

- **Iran 1962:** This case study demonstrates that Iran did not become involved in North Yemen's civil war in spite of the threat that revolutionary pan-Arabism could have posed to the Shah's regime because Iran had not suffered a perceived recent loss in terms of its regional status. While Iran suffered setbacks in the late 1950's through 1961, the shah achieved significant regional gains over the course of 1962: in fact, the détente agreement was finalized less than two weeks before the civil war began. Additionally, throughout the course of the Yemen war, the shah's Iran continued to gain in regional stature. While is difficult to explain why something did not happen (as opposed to why something did happen), the evidence in this case strongly suggests that there was therefore no need to intervene in a civil war to avert losses in regional status.

- **Iran 2015:** While Iran's intervention in Yemen beginning in 2015 is perhaps the weakest case for my hypotheses, there is still substantial evidence for both the status anxiety and great power explanations. Iranian leadership believed they had suffered regional losses over the course of the Arab Spring, and in Syria, Iran's key strategic ally, the Assad regime, was on the defensive, at the same time as the rise of ISIS, a radical Sunni terrorist organization, put pressure on the friendly Iraqi government and forced Iran to redeploy militias that it supported from Syria to Iraq to defend the regime there. Although Iran's positioning in the region is often perceived as offensively oriented, Iranian leaders are more likely to see themselves as defensively working to break out of international isolation while surrounded by opponents with superior conventional military capabilities. A lack of great power opposition, and occasional diplomatic support from Russia,

allowed Iran to escalate its intervention unimpeded between 2015 and 2018. Additionally, bureaucratic politics, and specifically the sidelining of President Rouhani's moderate faction by hardline factions including the IRGC-Quds Force made the intervention more likely. Additionally, an opportunism explanation has also shaped Iran's intervention. Iran's support for the Houthis over the course of the war suggests that Iranian officials have begun to see intervention as an opportunity to expand their influence as their Arab Gulf opponents have become mired in a seemingly unwinnable war. Thus, intervention offered Iran an opportunity to increase its regional status (as opposed to hedging against a loss) that would not incur large costs if their side lost. Nevertheless, as Iranian investments in Yemen increase and the international community increasingly views Iran as being closely linked to the Houthis, Iranian prestige and its reputation for supporting its proxies is on the line in a way that increases the costs to Iran of a Houthi defeat.

- **The UAE and Qatar:** In spite of their substantial policy differences, the status anxiety and great power relationship explanations help to explain both Qatar and the Emirates' decision to participate in the coalition intervention in Yemen. Emirati motivations are similar to that of their ally Saudi Arabia: Emirati officials believed that their regional status had declined over the course of the Arab Spring for similar reasons. U.S. support for the Saudi-led coalition facilitated intervention at a higher level on the intervention scale. While the UAE would likely still have been able to deploy its highly capable Special Operations forces in the south, UAE forces were reportedly working alongside U.S. Special Forces on counter-terror operations in the south. Additionally, the United

States, alongside the UK, has provided diplomatic cover for the intervention at the UN Security Council that has allowed the coalition to dodge international pressure to negotiate a settlement or modify its behavior to minimize the humanitarian effects of the intervention. While sectarian explanations point in the same causal direction, they are not ultimately satisfactory in explaining the intervention decision. Finally, domestic politics explanations, including bureaucratic politics and public opinion, fall short in these cases. Qatar's participation in the intervention is more puzzling on the surface than the Emirates' participation because of the intra-GCC dispute beginning in 2014. Qatari officials also appeared to believe that the intervention was a bad idea from the outset. In the case study, I show that Qatar's decision to join the coalition was driven by a bandwagoning logic intended to forestall a further loss of status in the region following the 2014 crisis.

The case studies demonstrate that opportunism, in addition to loss of status, can sometimes help to explain intervention decisions, particularly in the case of Iran in the ongoing conflict in Yemen. The logic of opportunism differs from the logic of status anxiety because it suggests that states are looking to make status gains, rather than hedge against further losses. Nevertheless, the logic of opportunism does fit into the status framework, as it demonstrates that states may sometimes intervene as a means of gaining regional status. This still suggests that leaders of states are still making intervention decisions based primarily on perceptions of status rather than straight-forward material security considerations. For example, Qatar and the UAE's interventions in Libya beginning in 2011 were apparently largely opportunistic. In the first year of the Arab Spring, the leaders of both states saw the events as an opportunity to increase their

status by helping likeminded regimes to win in the region. It was not until later in the conflict that both states began to see their interventions in Libya as failures. Nevertheless, it is hard to imagine how the outcome in Libya would have had substantial, material security repercussions for either the UAE or Qatar outside of the dynamics of their regional competition for status.

Anecdotally, opportunistic interventions also take the form of indirect rather than direct intervention for the most part. This suggests that states acting opportunistically are relatively more risk-averse than those that intervene directly in response to the loss of status, since direct intervention is much costlier in material terms, more visible, and more liable to fail in achieving its apparent aims.

The remainder of the conclusion chapter explores the theoretical and policy implications of my findings and outlines potential areas for future research.

Theoretical Implications

My theoretical findings have implications for the burgeoning literature on status in International Relations; the literatures on coercive diplomacy and international order; and help build a more precise understanding of the dynamics of "leverage" and "proxy wars," both often-used but ill-defined concepts.

First, my findings have significant implications for the growing literature on the role of status in International Relations, and help us to understand some of the significance of status in terms of explaining and understanding international behavior. The findings demonstrate that regional and international status is important not just in terms of relative ordinal ranking, but also in terms of how leaders perceive *change* in regional status. The findings suggest that other types of destabilizing or conflict-prone behavior could be triggered by changes in perceived status.

This also suggests that status anxiety could have implications in other areas of international relations outside of conflict behavior, where the literature has primarily been applied so far. Perceived changes in status, especially regional status, could drive other, seemingly irrational behavior that is sometimes ascribed to over-reach or misperception, or could help explain risk-acceptant behavior.

The findings here suggest that changes in status are not necessarily zero-sum, or to put it a different way, that a zero-sum framework is not the best way to understand status. As the case studies demonstrate, it is possible for two opponents to simultaneously believe that they have lost status vis-à-vis one another over the same period of time. In part, this is because regional competition is rarely dyadic, even though it is sometimes depicted that way. For example, while the 'Arab Cold War' period was characterized primarily by conflict between revolutionary and conservative regimes, there were also disputes and conflicts within these two blocs. While the conservative monarchies saw the rise of Qassim's regime in Iraq after the 1958 coup as a threat, so did Nasser, since Qassim posed a threat to this leadership of the revolutionary movement. Likewise, while the region is often characterized in the current period as engaged in a zero-sum, dyadic conflict between Iran and the Sunni Arab regimes led by Saudi Arabia, in fact there are conflicts within both sides, notably the intra-GCC disputes that flared up in 2014 and again in 2017. Thus, with multiple 'sides' during each regional conflict, it is possible for two of those sides to suffer from status losses at the same time.

This dynamic could also be the result of misperception by one or multiple sides. Leaders could believe that they have suffered a regional loss, when in fact in the eyes of others they have not. Because status is defined by collectively held beliefs rather than purely material factors, it may be perceived differently by different actors simultaneously. This may therefore be the result

of either misperception, or simply differing perceptions, where there is no single, empirically "correct" assessment of status ranking that exists independently of collective perceptions.

Perhaps most theoretically interesting, this phenomenon points to the possibility that status is not in fact zero-sum, even amongst multiple actors, and may not be an ordinal ranking. In other words, it may indeed be possible for there to be an overall loss of status (i.e., multiple actors lose status that is not reciprocally gained by another actor). While delving into this idea further is outside of the scope of this research, it does suggest a fruitful area for future research in the literature on regional and international status.

The findings related to my second Hypothesis, concerning relationships with great powers, speak to the literatures on coercive diplomacy as well as international order. As reviewed in the introduction chapter, an older literature on coercive diplomacy sought to explain how states use coercive capacity below the direct use of force to "persuade an opponent to cease his [sic] aggression rather than bludgeon him into stopping."[705] While this literature is helpful in explaining how states may go about coercing their opponents, it says much less about the relationship between more and less powerful states when they are allies or partners, and how powerful states seek to use a combination of carrots and sticks to coerce and otherwise shape a partner's behavior. Subsequent research has introduced concepts that speak to this question. For example, the literature on alliances has explained intra-alliance behavior and burden-sharing.[706] Nevertheless, explanations for coercive relations between more and less powerful states when they are otherwise allies, partners, or friendly in other ways, remains under-developed. The more recent literature on international order, which describes relationships between great powers and

[705] George, *Forceful Persuasion,* 11.
[706] E.g., see Andrew Bennett, Joseph Lepgold, and Danny Unger, *Friends in Need: Burden Sharing in the Gulf War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997); Charles A. Kupchan, "NATO and the Persian Gulf: Examining Intra-alliance Behavior," *International Organization* 42, no. 2 (1988).

other states that are neither completely hierarchical nor completely anarchic, also helps speak to this question.[707] I believe that the theoretical concepts that I develop of leverage and logistical military assistance speak to these literatures in interesting ways, even where there might be points of disagreement.

Finally, my research helps to elucidate and build out two concepts that are often used in discussions of internationally relations, but poorly understood and defined: leverage, and proxy wars.

While the term leverage is often used colloquially to describe the relations between more and less powerful friendly states—for example, see the debates around the U.S.-Saudi relationships after the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi—the term is not defined in the IR literature, to my knowledge, nor well-understood. These case studies are a first cut at defining leverage and developing an understanding of the conditions under which leverage may or may not effectively shape the behavior of less powerful states. This analysis is a contribution to the nexus of the coercive diplomacy, alliance behavior, and international order literatures that explains these types of relations. While all three of these literatures touch on the question of what "friendly coercion," or leverage, could look like, more research remains to be done.

My research also contributes to building a more robust understanding of the dynamics of proxy wars. The term "proxy wars" is often used, especially in popular understandings of civil war conflicts that involve outside intervention, but definitions differ widely. As a recent New America report rightly notes, "proxy wars have been 'chronically under-analyzed' and under-

[707] E.g., see Daniel H. Nexon and Thomas Wright, "What's at Stake in the American Empire Debate," *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 2 (2007); David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); David C. Kang, "Hierarchy, Balancing, and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations," *International Security* 28, no. 3 (2004).

theorized."[708] Additionally, while the behavior of proxies in sub-state conflicts, and relations between proxies and their sponsors, are relatively better understood, and the relations between great powers and their proxies (especially during the Cold War) have been more closely studied, there has been very little attention to regional states' decisions to engage in proxy conflict. Thus, another theoretical contribution of my research is to begin to unpack the dynamics of proxy relationships, especially the decision-making of regional interveners (or potential interveners).

Policy Implications

Regional military intervention tends to transform relatively localized conflicts into regional conflicts that spread across the borders of the civil war state and often last longer, generating higher numbers of casualties from violence and other grave humanitarian effects. Intervention in civil wars often intensifies the fighting and threatens spillover effects in an already unstable region. My dissertation research has implications for practitioners who are concerned with civil war conflict resolution and managing the United States' relationships with its allies, because my findings can help policymakers to anticipate regional intervention by understanding the 'warning signs' that intervention is more likely. My findings also suggest specific tools that policymakers can use to exert leverage over regional states, including coercion and assurance measures, to limit regional states' intervention in civil wars when these warning signs are present.

Obama administration officials were divided about whether U.S. policy could have an effect on the extent of the Saudi-led coalition's intervention. Officials also worried about the effects on the United States' relationships with its regional allies if the administration did decide to use

[708] Candace Rondeaux and David Sterman, *Twenty-First Century Proxy Warfare: Confronting Strategic Innovation in a Multipolar World Since the 2011 NATO Intervention* (Washington, D.C.: New America, 2019), 11.

leverage to pressure the coalition into changing its behavior. The findings suggest that the administration could have used its leverage to affect the extent of the intervention.

The Hodeidah Port episode appears particularly instructive in this regard. The Trump administration's willingness to publicly criticize the coalition's blockade on Hodeidah Port in late 2017 did not do lasting damage to the U.S.-Saudi relationship: indeed, MbS traveled across the United States just a few months later to drum up political support and investment. The perceived strain in relations under the Obama administration with U.S. allies in the Gulf could be the result of Saudi and Emirati complaints that about being abandoned by the United States that were intended to pressure the Obama administration to be more engaged in the region and to push back more aggressively against Iran. On the other hand, the Trump administration only issued the public warning about a narrow element of the intervention, and only after a significant international outcry, Congressional pressure, and dire warnings from humanitarian agencies. The administration could therefore have claimed to Saudi and Emirati leaders that its hands were effectively tied and that they were forced to issue the public warning, thus helping to preserve the relationship. Additionally, MbS may have felt that he needed U.S. approval and investment after his domestic 'anti-corruption' drive, giving the Trump administration additional leverage that made Saudi Arabia more likely to forgive the public criticism. Although endogeneity makes it difficult to pull apart the causal chain, in terms of policy implications, these findings suggest that the United States can successfully use leverage over Arab Gulf allies to affect the extent of their intervention in Yemen, as well as their willingness to come to the negotiating table.

My research also contributes to policymakers' understandings by building a more precise model of what proxy wars look like. Like academics, policymakers also have an imprecise understanding of what the term proxy wars means, or have widely differing definitions. There is

especially a gap in policymakers' understanding of how other states, especially regional states, perceive and think about proxy wars, often in ways that differ from U.S. policymakers' perceptions.

My findings also speak to ongoing debates amongst policymakers about whether and how the United States can affect its partners' intervention decisions, or other policies that may stand in contradiction to U.S. interests. Again, the debates about whether the United States had enough leverage to affect Saudi Arabia's human rights-related behavior in light of the Khashoggi murder, or whether the United States does not possess enough leverage to do so without seriously harming its own security interests, is just one recent example of this genre of policy debate. These case studies demonstrate that the United States can make a decisive difference in its partners' intervention policies, but that is a) mitigated by its partners' perceptions of their own interests, and b) often has to be balanced with competing interests in the broader relationship. To take just one example, the Kennedy administration prioritized other elements of its relationship with Nasser's Egypt, and acknowledged internally that these were more important than using leverage to push back against the North Yemen intervention, but the Johnson administration made a different assessment, with different results.

These findings also suggest that the United States should invest in measures to make peace negotiations more successful in order to remove the temptation to intervene in the first place. My findings show that while the United States can use leverage to affect its partners' intervention decisions, it can rarely prevent intervention entirely, since regional states may simply intervene at a lower level on the intervention ladder that is more covert and therefore plausibly deniable. At the same time, great powers have little coercive leverage over their opponents intervention, short of becoming militarily involved themselves: the United States'

inability to significantly affect Iran's intervention calculus in Yemen beginning in 2015 is an example of this dynamic.

To compensate for these weaknesses, the literature on civil wars and conflict resolution, as well as recent experience in Yemen, demonstrates that there are several relatively less costly diplomatic investments that the United States and international community can make to help end civil wars through negotiations and political settlement, thereby removing the temptation to intervene.

First, negotiations are more likely to succeed when there is good-faith stakeholder buy-in from all sides and the possibility of spoilers is thereby minimized.[709] My research suggests that while the United States cannot completely eliminate the possibility of spoilers, it can use its leverage to pressure its allies into engaging in good-faith negotiating efforts, and that when this leverage is used in a concerted way, it is often successful.[710] Additionally, the United States can affect international frameworks that inadvertently incentive spoilers. In Yemen, UN Security Council Resolution 2216 is unworkable because it calls for the Houthis to unilaterally disarm, fails to reflect on-the-ground dynamics of the conflict, and does not account for the wider array of Yemeni stakeholders who could act as spoilers to any agreement. The United States, working with the United Kingdom, could play a critical role in passing a new UN Security Council resolution that more accurately reflects the reality of the conflict, thereby supporting efforts to find a workable political settlement. Second, as Barbara Walter's work has shown, third parties can play an important role as guarantors of peace agreements. The United States can help its partners to make a credible commitment to a negotiated settlement, and could also support a

[709] Kelly M. Greenhill and Solomon Major. "The Perils of Profiling: Civil War Spoilers and the Collapse of Intrastate Peace Accords," *International Security* 31, vol. 3 (2007); Matthew Hoddie and Caroline A. Hartzell, eds. *Strengthening Peace in Post-Civil War States: Transforming Spoilers into Stakeholders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
[710] Alexandra Stark, "Yemen's Long Road to Peace," *Council on Foreign Relations,* November 20, 2018.

robust UN peacekeeping mission to assist with the implementation of such an agreement. Finally, the literature has demonstrated that peace agreements are more successful when women participate actively in their negotiation. When women participate in peace processes, according to one study, the agreement that results is 35% more likely to last for at least 15 years.[711] While there was a quota for women's participation in the NDC process in 2011, only one woman was at the negotiating table for the Stockholm peace talks in late 2018.[712] The United States may have little say over who represents the Houthis in peace talks, but it can encourage the Saudi-led coalition to include women, both in their own delegations' ranks and to in turn encourage the inclusion of Yemeni women themselves. These are just three suggestions that arise out of a much broader literature on conflict resolution. This literature speaks to steps that the United States can take by using its leverage to influence the behavior of its regional partners, as my research suggests.

Areas for Future Research

My findings also suggest several areas where future research may be fruitful. First, as suggested above, future research should look more carefully at the differences between motivations of related to status anxiety versus opportunism, and seek to understand in a more systematic way how opportunism fits into the framework of competition over regional status.

Second, while my dissertation research has focused on intervention in Yemen in an effort to compare like-with-like, additional case studies of intervention (or lack of intervention) in the

[711] Patty Chang, Mayesha Alam, Roslyn Warren, Rukmani Bhatia, and Rebecca Turkington, *Women Leading Peace: A Close Examination of Women's Political Participation in Peace Processes in Northern Ireland, Kenya, and the Philippines* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2015); Marie O'Reilly, Andrea Ó Sulleabhain, and Thania Paffenholz, *Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes* (Geneva: International Peace Institute, 2015).
[712] Afrah Nasser, "Yemen: Women, War & Political Marginalization," *Atlantic Council MENA Source*, January 25, 2019.

MENA region in this time period could provide additional tests for my hypotheses. A case study of Syria's intervention in Black September in 1970, or Gulf states' interventions in Syria following the Arab Spring, would be useful in this vein.

Third, future research could test the applicability of my theory to other regions of the world. While there are several factors that make the MENA region unique to study—including the overwhelming presence of monarchies and personalist dictatorships with relatively few veto players, the frequency of civil wars in the region that provide opportunities for intervention and shape how leaders think about their regional status, and the importance of the United States' security relationship with many MENA states—I believe that the theory would travel to other regions with minor modifications.

Finally, in this study, I have tried to make each variable as discrete from other variables as possible for the purposes of process tracing and causal inference. However, now that these variables have been more carefully mapped out, future research could fruitfully engage in understanding the potential interaction effects between variables. For instance, while I treat my hypotheses as being discrete from domestic politics for the sake of analysis, there are likely important, if complex, relationships amongst these variables. Such research could yield further insight into the puzzling and important phenomenon of regional intervention in civil wars.

Significance of the Research: Why Study Intervention in Yemen?

Studying regional intervention in these two civil wars in Yemen has yielded theoretical and policy-relevant insights. These interventions also had important consequences for the outcome of the conflicts themselves, as well as effects on the broader regional and international politics of the time. Thus, intervention has had substantial and long-lasting effects both in terms

of the lives of affected Yemeni civilians and for the region, and these effects can last decades into the future.

Significance of Intervention in the North Yemen Civil War (1962-70)

The end of the 1962-70 civil war led to a realignment in regional competition in the MENA region. By draining Egypt's economy, damaging Nasser's relationship with the United States, increasing Egypt's dependency on the Soviet Union, and battering Nasser's international reputation, the intervention precipitated the decline of Egypt as a regional power, and thereby led to the relative regional ascendency of Egypt's opponent, Saudi Arabia.

Along with the 1967 war, it also effectively marked the decline of Nasser's revolutionary model. Over the course of the war, Nasser's regional influence continued to wane: Ba'athists regimes that provided a competing model of Arab governance were on the rise in Syria and Iraq, and both states split sharply with Nasser after a short-lived attempt to reunite the UAR in 1963. The Egyptian economy continued to decline due to corruption and low productivity in addition to high military expenditures.[713] The instability and lack of popular support for the revolutionary regime, and the YAR regime's inability to sustain itself without massive external intervention, played an important role in the diminution of the revolution's appeal to the Arab masses.[714]

The YAR that emerged when the fighting finally ended in 1970 was weak, divided, and dependent on Saudi aid.[715] The civil war in the 1960's was one in a series of conflicts fought in Yemen in the second half of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st, including wars fought between North and South Yemen in 1972 and 1979; an insurgency in North Yemen from 1978 to 1982; a civil war between the central government and southern secessionists in 1994; an

[713] Westad, *The Cold War*, 458.
[714] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 204.
[715] Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 205.

insurgency by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula beginning in 1998; and the Houthi insurgency beginning in 2004. This series of conflicts, all of which have involved some degree of outside intervention, have ensured that Yemen continues to experience a high level of poverty, internal instability, and state weakness.

Significance of Intervention in the Yemen Civil War (2015-present)

The civil war in Yemen would most likely have ended in March 2015, when President Hadi fled the country as Houthi forces advanced on Aden, absent the Saudi-led intervention. Instead, the Saudi-led coalition pushed back against Houthi advances and Iran's escalating support for the Houthis facilitated their ability to successfully push back against the coalition. As a result, after years of fighting, the civil war "has mostly settled into a pragmatic, if economically destructive, stalemate. Front-line fighting [is] confined to largely static battlefields, with many actors increasingly focused on the internal politics of individual territories."[716] Although Hadi's government is still the officially recognized state according to the international community, Houthi forces still control the capital, most government institutions, and up to 70% of Yemen's military resources. Houthi forces are firmly ensconced in the northern Zaydi highlands." While the Stockholm Agreement in late 2018 led to a temporary ceasefire agreement in Hodeidah, areas of the Red Sea coast and areas as far south as Taiz are still actively contested.[717] Southern Yemen has in many ways become de facto separated from the north, with the Southern Transition Council (STC), a loose coalition of southern groups who receive support from the UAE, governing in most southern governorates.[718] The outbreak of fighting between STC and

[716] Salisbury, *Yemen,* 2.
[717] Alley, "Collapse of the Houthi-Saleh Alliance and the Future of Yemen's War," 9.
[718] Dahlgren, "Popular Revolution Advances Towards State Building in Southern Yemen," 17.

Hadi-aligned forces in August 2019, who are ostensibly on the same side of the civil war, only raises more questions for the future of the war and the Yemeni state.

Intervention has driven fractionalization amongst both sides: while the conflict is often depicted as the Hadi government facing off against the Houthis, in reality these are "just two actors among a multiplicity of groups, and face their own internal divisions," as demonstrated by fighting between Houthi forces and Saleh loyalists in December 2017 in Sana'a, and between southern separatists and Hadi's forces in January 2018 and again in August 2019 in Aden. Yemen has effectively become a "chaos state," with a patchwork of governance exercised almost exclusively at the local level.[719] As the war entered its fourth year, the UN declared Yemen the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with three quarters of the population—more than 22 million people—in desperate need of humanitarian assistance.[720] With little chance of agreement amongst international actors about how the conflict should end, in addition to the multiplicity of actors on the ground and increasingly dire humanitarian situation, it is difficult to imagine how the Yemeni civil war could end conclusively any time soon.

Closing

My dissertation research on the causes of regional power military intervention in civil wars in the MENA region is rooted in concern for the devastating effects of these conflicts and the potential for intervention to increase the duration and intensity of civil wars. I hope that my research can provide policymakers with an understanding of the conditions under which such intervention is likely to occur, and how the United States' relationship with its allies will affect

[719] Salisbury, *Yemen,* 2.
[720] Daniel Nikbakht and Sheena McKenzie, "The Yemen War is the World's Worst Humanitarian Crisis, UN says," *CNN*, April 3, 2018.

this intervention decision-making process, thus contributing to conflict mitigation and peacebuilding efforts in the region.

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